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A Community Newsletter from the Contra Costa Water District | Volume 22, Number 1, Spring 2008

The Facts About Pharmaceuticals and Personal Care Products in Drinking Water

Over the last century, drinking-water utilities in the United States have developed water-treatment and distribution systems that reliably deliver safe, clean water to hundreds of millions of taps. Our drinking-water systems are among the best in the world.

We are accustomed to trusting our tap water, and we often drink and use it without thought. So, naturally, many people were concerned by the recent news that trace amounts of the compounds used to make medications and personal care products had been detected in drinking water throughout the country.

As you consider the news, you should know the facts. First, it is important to note that the quality of your tap water is closely monitored and regularly tested. It meets or exceeds all state and federal safety standards, and water-quality information is always available at www.ccwater.com/waterquality/ or by calling (925) 688-8156 and requesting a water quality report.

You should also know that the compounds detected in the nation's water were found in tiny amounts, usually a few parts per trillion. This is about 1,000 times lower than the levels that are typically established for drinking water standards. These traces were detected by new, advanced technologies that now enable scientists to find the tiniest amounts of numerous substances.

This emerging water-quality concern is being addressed by the Contra Costa Water District, which works hard to protect its source water and uses state-of-the-art treatment processes. In 2007, the District participated in a large, national research study as part of a proactive approach to learning more about this issue. The District tested for dozens of compounds and found some in trace amounts. They included an anti-bacterial agent often added to soaps and toothpastes, a component of polyvinyl chloride (PVC) pipes and other materials, a widely used weed killer, and a sulfa-based drug frequently prescribed for earaches and urinary tract infections. These are all compounds that people regularly expose themselves to in higher concentrations through medications and contact with everyday household products.

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Garden Smart for a Landscape That Thrives

Now is a great time to update your landscape so that it's suited to our dry summer climate. When you garden for your climate, you are gardening smart because less water and effort will be needed to keep your landscape fresh and attractive, even when the days are long and temperatures soar.



Relying on plants that prefer a dry summer climate is a common-sense gardening practice that has been given several names in the past: California-friendly gardening, Xeriscaping and drought-tolerant

gardening, to name a few. Regardless of the terminology, it makes sense and is relatively simple to do. Just make sure you choose plants that are considered low-water-users and suited to the soil in your garden.

The Contra Costa Water District offers a wealth of smart gardening information on its website at www.ccwater.com/conserv. There, you'll find plant lists and landscaping guidance, as well as

Resources for the Smart Gardener

Interactive, Water-Wise CD-ROM

The Contra Costa Water District offers a free, interactive gardening compact disc (CD-ROM) to help you plan a new landscape or update your current one. Called Water-Wise Gardening in Contra Costa County, it can be requested by customers who live in the county at www.ccwater.com/conserv or by calling (925) 688-8320. The CD-ROM



includes extensive plant lists with information about each plant's needs, a photo gallery of well-designed landscapes and design and maintenance tips.

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numerous links to other helpful gardening websites. You'll also find plenty of ideas for saving water inside your home.

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The Contra Costa Water District (CCWD) serves treated and untreated water to approximately 550,000 people in central and eastern Contra Costa County. CCWD provides treated water to Clayton, Clyde, Concord, Pacheco, Port Costa and parts of Martinez, Pleasant Hill and Walnut Creek.

In addition, CCWD sells wholesale treated water to the City of Antioch and the Golden State Water Company in Bay Point, and treats water at the Randall-Bold Water Treatment Plant in Oakley for distribution to the Diablo Water District and the City of Brentwood.

CCWD also sells untreated water to the cities of Antioch, Martinez and Pittsburg and the Golden State Water Company in Bay Point, as well as 22 industrial customers.

Garden Smart Landscaping

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Whether you're planning a new landscape or updating the one you already have, you can follow the seven principles below to garden smart for a thriving landscape.

PLANNING AND DESIGN This is an essential first step to ensure that your landscape is organized for aesthetics, practicality and water efficiency. Large landscape installations or revamps can be complicated and often require the assistance of a landscape architect or professional designer. Don't let that discourage you, however, if you are an experienced gardener or intrepid do-it-yourselfer. There are plenty of helpful resources available, including books, gardening societies, garden centers and the internet. Small jobs and landscape updates are generally easier than large, new landscapes.

PRACTICAL TURF AREAS Turf is the thirstiest component in a landscape. Keep lawn to a minimum and design lawn areas for practical purposes: play, maintenance access and light traffic. For some homeowners, a front lawn is unnecessary and can be replaced with trees, shrubs, boulders and pathways, or mulched areas. In backyards, lawn can be minimized and partially replaced by a deck or paved patio, which usually ends up being more useful than a lawn.

EFFICIENT IRRIGATION Today's irrigation technology enables slow, steady and specific water application. Sprinkler systems should be designed and adjusted to prevent water from being sprayed on pavement, decks, buildings or any other surface that doesn't need to be watered. Irrigation stations should be separated so that each one waters plants with similar needs. Lawn and shrubs, especially, should be on separate valves because they require different amounts of water. Consider drip systems for shrubs and trees.

SOIL ANALYSIS Heavy clay soil needs lots of organic amendment. This will improve water penetration and oxygen delivery to plant roots. Get to know your soil and amend it as needed prior to planting. A soil test will guide you in amending your soil.

MULCHING Two to three inches of mulch will keep soil cool, protect plants from moisture loss and reduce weed growth. Mulch can be rocks, wood chips, bark, or shredded wood.

APPROPRIATE PLANTS There is a place for every plant in a smart garden when located correctly. Group plants according to their water and sun needs. This is called hydrozoning. There are many interesting and colorful low-water-use plants now available. Take advantage of these whenever possible.

ON-GOING MAINTENANCE Adjusting the schedule of your automatic watering system every month can save a tremendous amount of water. Generally, lawns can thrive if watered no more than four days per week during the peak summer months and fewer days per week during the rest of the year. Check your sprinklers regularly to make sure they work properly. Weeding regularly and adding plenty of mulch will also help plants thrive.

Following these seven principles will help your landscape thrive for years to come while you conserve water and control your water bill.



Other Ways to Save Water

The Contra Costa Water District is offering rebates to help you save water this summer. For more information about the following rebate programs, go to www.ccwater.com/conserve.

Clothes Washer Rebates:

The District and PG&E

have partnered to provide rebates up to \$200 for qualifying high-efficiency clothes washers. For information, check our website or talk to your local appliance dealer.

High Efficiency Toilet Rebates: The District is offering rebates of up to \$175 toward the purchase of qualifying high-efficiency toilets (HETs) to replace older high volume (pre-1992) toilets. Check our website to view the list of approved HETs and for program eligibility information.

Smart Sprinkler Timer Rebate: For a limited time, the District is offering rebates on qualifying smart sprinkler timers. Smart sprinkler timers take the guesswork out of landscape water scheduling. More information about smart sprinkler timers and program eligibility is available on our website.

You Can Help Keep Your Water Clean

Keeping our rivers, lakes and ground-water supplies clean is the best way to ensure that safe, clean water flows from our taps.

You can do your part by properly disposing of unused or expired medications, other personal care products and hazardous household products. By treating these products as hazardous waste, you can prevent them from eventually entering our waterways.

The term "household hazardous waste" encompasses a wide range of products. It includes household cleaners, mercury thermometers, standard and compact fluorescent light bulbs, batteries, automotive fluids and cleaners, paint and paint-related products, garden care products, hair and skin care products, and perfumes.

Central Contra Costa County Residents: The Central Contra Costa Sanitary District has a household hazardous waste disposal facility open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., Tuesdays through Saturdays, at 4797 Imhoff Place in Martinez. It accepts waste from Central County residents only. Personnel there

are working to obtain the permits needed to accept and dispose of medications. Check with the sanitary district before taking medications to its waste facility. Medications can also be discarded at the Elephant Pharmacy in Walnut Creek or by mixing them with wet garbage, bagging them and putting the bag in the trash. Information about the Elephant Pharmacy's medication take-back program is available at www.teleosis.org or 925-658-5300. Information about the Central County household hazardous waste facility is available at 1-800-646-1431 or www.centalsan.org.

East Contra Costa County Residents: The Delta Diablo Sanitary District has a household hazardous waste disposal facility open 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays at 2550 Pittsburg-Antioch Highway, Antioch. Prescription medications are accepted at this facility. It accepts waste from East County residents only. More information is available at 925-756-1990 or www.ddsd.org.

Facts About Drinking Water

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The fact that a small amount of a substance can be detected does not mean it is harmful to humans. Research conducted around the world to date has not identified a health concern associated with pharmaceuticals and personal care products at minute levels in drinking water.

More research is anticipated to determine whether the compounds in pharmaceuticals and personal care products pose a health risk. Research is also expected to identify the best ways to manage these compounds, if that is necessary. You can count on the District to keep you informed as it continues to address this issue proactively and the results of research become known.

In the meantime, you can help keep your source water clean by following the advice in the article to the left, and by not buying or using products you don't need.