



A Prescription for Protecting Groundwater

Wisconsin Groundwater Guardian Team Organizes Pharmaceutical Take-Back Event

By Cathy Lotzer, Marshfield Area Groundwater Guardians

Attending The Groundwater Foundation's National Conference and Groundwater Guardian Designation Celebration in Washington, DC in November 2004 was, to say the least, an eye-opening experience for me. The conference, titled "Making the Connection: Groundwater and Public Health" had a tract which focused on Emerging Public Health Issues, specifically, Pharmaceuticals, Hormones, and Personal Care Products in our Groundwater Resources.

After having my eyes opened wide, I returned to Wisconsin and shared this information with the rest of my Groundwater Guardian team. We immediately decided that a future Result Oriented Activity for our team should focus on this very subject and produce results that will have a positive impact on our community's groundwater resources.

Our local Groundwater Guardian team consists of our local Water and Wastewater Utility Superintendents, the Director of Public Health Microbiology Laboratory at our local Marshfield Clinic Research Foundation, and several local pharmacists. What a great combination of people and expertise to work with! We couldn't be more fortunate!

With these, and many other people gathered together, we began to talk about various concerns we had related to pharmaceuticals and personal care products, including the future safety of our groundwater supply, the emerging health issues of endocrine disruptors being found in Wisconsin's surface waters, and what can we do about it.

Our first plan was to conduct an educational campaign within our community. We wanted people to know

they should not flush pharmaceuticals and other personal care products down their toilets. We also wanted to inform them that throwing these items in the trash wasn't a good alternative either. So, our group set out trying to find the most proper method of disposal. Unfortunately, this wasn't so simple. We contacted U.S. Environmental Protection Agency officials, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources officials, and local experts, all of whom agreed with the no flushing and no landfilling ideas, but no one could give us the answer to the most proper disposal method.

Our group decided that we couldn't conduct an effective educational campaign without specific and accurate information to provide to people. Our next thought was to collect these items from the general public, thinking perhaps the local clinic and pharmacies could do this for us. Wrong! We encountered our first hurdle. We found that, for instance, narcotics cannot be possessed by anyone other than the patient whose name is on the prescription. It would be unlawful for us or anyone else to collect these without the involvement of local law enforcement.

So our next step was to involve local law enforcement. We invited them to our next meeting, explained our predicament and they were happy to assist us with a collection, so our hurdle was crossed. Now we only needed to get Drug Enforcement Agency approval of our "chain of custody" (method and process of collection). This approval is currently pending for us, but we modeled our chain after a similar method already approved, so we are confident that this hurdle will also be crossed.

All that remained for us was planning the specifics of the one-day collection event, coordinating an agency to assist us with collection of hazardous waste, and then arranging proper disposal of the items collected. Each of these hurdles was crossed without much resistance, especially since we were able to plan our event the same day as the existing local county Clean Sweep household hazardous waste collection event and use the same hazardous disposal firm.

I must be forgetting something – oh yes – money! We estimated needing \$10,000 to hold this one-day collection. That estimate was based on 500 pounds of uncontrolled substances and some container costs, as well as an estimate of 10 to 30 gallons of controlled substances and container costs.

Our local water and wastewater utilities had already each donated \$2,000 toward the event. That left \$6,000 that needed to be secured before we could move forward. Again, because of contacts from our team members, we were very fortunate to receive additional funding from the Marshfield Clinic, St. Joseph's Hospital, and Security Health Plan. In addition, several other area businesses donated money toward the event. So, the last hurdle has now been crossed.

Our team is in the process of meeting regularly and forming subcommittees to work on promotion, advertising, additional fund raising for contingency plans, and working with our local Clean Sweep organizers on coordinating each of our efforts for this one-day collection event on May 13, 2006. ♦

Reprinted from:
The Aquifer, Spring 2006,
Volume 20, Number 4
published quarterly by
The Groundwater Foundation
E-mail: info@groundwater.org
Web: www.groundwater.org