

## Anti-Depressant Found in UK Drinking Water

Britons could unwittingly be swallowing traces of the anti-depressant Prozac® and other drugs in drinking water, according to an August 2004 report from the *Scotsman.com*.

Environmentalists have labeled the situation “hidden mass medication of the unsuspecting public.” A study about the situation notes that pharmaceutical residues can travel through the sewage system and end up in the water. The levels of any such residue is unknown, and the United Kingdom’s (UK) Environment Agency (EA) has called on the drug industry to prove its products are unlikely to cause significant harm to the environment.

Prozac® has been found by the EA to be “both toxic and persistent” and “a substance that could be of potential concern,” according to the study by Norman Baker MP, environment secretary. There has been a 166 percent increase in prescriptions for anti-depressants in England since 1991—up to 24 million a year.

“The Government is quite simply not taking its responsibility to public health seriously. It is alarming that there is no monitoring of levels of Prozac and other pharmacy residues in our drinking water,” says Baker.

“There also is no evidence that filtration eliminates these contaminants from water and Ministers don’t even know which water works are fitted with which filtering devices anyway. From start to finish this is a demonstration of staggering complacency from a ‘don’t-know-don’t-care government.’ The public has a right to know what’s in our water supplies and whether they are inadvertently taking drugs like Prozac®.”

Last year, the EA announced it had completed research focusing on commonly used pharmaceuticals. In its study, the agency reviewed 500 of the most commonly used pharmaceuticals in England and Wales and monitored 12 thought to pose the greatest potential environmental threat, including painkillers, antibiotics, anti-cancer drugs, and anti depressants. Of these, 10 were found in sewage treatment work effluents and eight were detected in the rivers receiving these effluents.

The *LibDem* report says the DWI regulations do not specify limits for pharmaceutical residues in drinking water and these are not tested for during water quality assessments.

A spokeswoman for the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, which includes the DWI, said: “It is extremely unlikely that there is a risk, as such drugs are excreted in very low concentrations and biodegraded during sewage treatment and in watercourses.

“There is also a large dilution effect. Furthermore, advanced treatment processes installed for pesticide removal are effective in removing drug residues—these are commonly found in waters abstracted from lowland rivers.”



Photo Source: [www.photos.com](http://www.photos.com)

## Drugs in Drinking Water Making Headlines

A group of “gender-bender” surfers protested outside a government office about what they claim is the cocktail of endocrine disrupting chemicals being discharged into recreational waters, according to an August 2004 report on the *Scotsman.com*.

The delegation of male surfers from the Cornwall-based environmental pressure group Surfers Against Sewage—wearing wetsuits, make-up, colored wigs, and high heels, and carrying surfboards—demonstrated outside the United Kingdom’s (UK) Department of the Environment.

They called for urgent research into the public health risks from the unregulated discharge of what they say are endocrine disrupting compounds, antibiotics, and pharmaceutical products into the nation’s rivers, lakes, and seas.

The group said the demonstration followed widespread concern for wildlife and human health from endocrine disrupting chemicals, prescription drugs, and antibiotics that are being found in significant quantities in effluent dominated waters after being discharged from sewage and waste water treatment plants.

The group said the sex change phenomenon in fish was already widespread in the UK and that a recent survey of UK rivers had found over a third of male fish exhibited female characteristics.

The contraceptive pill as a significant substance in domestic sewage effluent was also thought to have had an effect on the feminizing effects seen in fish, according to the group.

“It has also been reported that anti-depressant drugs are finding their way into rivers from sewage treatment works, with some experts believing such drugs affect the ability to reproduce. The reports have made depressing news for recreational water users,” says the group, adding that little research had been carried out on humans in relation to the rapid increase of feminizing hormones accumulating in the water environment.



Photos by Surfers Against Sewage. <http://www.sas.org.uk>

Surfers Against Sewage (SAS) campaign for clean, safe recreational waters, free from sewage effluents, toxic chemicals and nuclear waste. Using a solution based argument of viable and sustainable alternatives, SAS highlight the inherent flaws in current practices, attitudes and legislation, challenging industry, legislators and politicians to end their 'pump and dump' policies. Find out more about them on their Web site at [www.sas.org.uk](http://www.sas.org.uk).

“Recreational water users, such as surfers, are now becoming increasingly concerned over the long-term effects chemicals, hormones and antibiotics may be having on their bodies when marine and freshwater wildlife are already showing such alarming changes,” according to the group.

“For years, surfers have been at risk from sewage-polluted water illnesses as they spend a lot of time immersing and ingesting water as part of the sport,” says Richard Hardy, campaign director. “With the water environment coming under attack from a new cocktail of ‘invisible nasties’ with gender-bending capabilities, its time for an urgent assessment of the public health risks associated with such compounds and how they bypass the sewage treatment system.”