

Pharmaceuticals in Water – Knowledge Cluster meeting
Discussion led by Susan Holtz, Senior Policy Analyst at CIELAP
January 26, 2006

Susan opened with a discussion of how “messy” and complicated the issue is. She clarified that the paper is meant for a wide audience and aims to provide an overview, as well as a policy analysis of the issue. Many substances have been grouped together in the paper because they are small in size and require a specific type of monitoring. Susan then clarified that her recommendations are intended to provide a range of useful actions. A significant issue is that a strategy requires knowledge about the entire issue; this is something we don’t yet have.

Areas of discussion at the meeting included:

Recommendation #3: A participant brought up the fact that there is no monitoring/testing of sewage or what is coming out of sewage treatment plants.

- We could have regulatory as well as scientific angle (requirements)
- We could do a review of what takes out what
- What does “get rid of” mean? Is the substance now in the sludge??
- Maybe we need to look at this more @ a provincial level; maybe by-laws aren’t enough
- Provincial laws were developed to deal with phosphorus and other substances that we knew about THEN. We likely need to review these laws BUT it may be that we just simply don’t know how to measure the emerging contaminants.
- Hospital incinerators are not good enough; maybe we need to treat it as toxic waste (secure landfills)

Idea: Take-back programs for Veterinary Pharmaceuticals. There may be one such program operating through OMAFRA.

Question: Who should pay for small sewage treatment plant – who should get fined? The problem is not like 1 big factory, it’s the many individuals that play a role...

Recommendation 10: (public education) Great idea but how do you actually do it?

- Many people simply don’t understand the issue – a bit more knowledge could help.
- The strongest angle that we have is that people want to protect themselves and their children!!

Green Pharmaceuticals. These are pharmaceuticals that are not “green” but break down very quickly. We could develop some kind of multiple rating system (bioaccumulation; hormone regulation, etc...) – there is one BUT it’s online (it could be on the bottle).

- Issue – we can’t prescribe something based more on the environment than health but at least people could know their options.

- Look at it from an upstream perspective – homeopathy can help; the public could be educated about these; the use of organic food.
- We need a new type of science to deal with so many uncertainties – we should examine corporate science...

NEXT STEPS; Additional Actions.

Comments included:

- Health care and reducing disposal within the facilities – hub for piloting issue – people like to see success
- There should be more focus on outreach (scientific especially) – the more people KNOW the more they can interpret the bottles. We need to translate materials for the public.
- Could drug stores carry the factsheets? Where could they be put? Where it would be relevant to them... How do we actually distribute the information? Community Health Groups. How do you “package” the debate between health and the environment?
 - Need more research into how to feed everyone yet not use pharmaceuticals.
 - Look into economics of the agricultural industry; how can you make it economic? Can Canada do same as Europe?