EPA Targets Chemicals, Estrogens

Contaminants: For the first time, agency is considering regulation of pharmaceuticals in drinking water

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Pharmaceuticals including a number of estrogens, pesticides, and two major perfluorinated compounds are among the 104 chemicals EPA listed today for possible regulation in drinking water.

This marks the first time the agency will consider pharmaceuticals for potential regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act, an EPA spokeswoman tells C&EN. That law governs the quality of the water that public utilities supply to homes and commercial facilities.

The Pharmaceutical Research & Manufacturers of America, an industry trade group, did not return calls for reaction to EPA's action.

Several estrogens made the agency's "contaminant candidate list," including equilin, equilin, estradiol, estrene, ethyl estradiol, and mestranol. Their uses include hormone replacement therapy and birth control pills. Another pharmaceutical, the antibiotic erythromycin, is also listed.

EPA compiles lists of contaminants known or anticipated to be found in public water systems as a first step toward possible regulation under the Safe Drinking Water Act. Today's action marks the third list the agency has finalized since 1998. Many contaminants on the previous lists have not been regulated.

EPA says it will continue to collect and evaluate data on the 104 chemicals and 12 microbes, including the hepatitis A virus, that made the new list. The agency says it will determine by 2013 whether to propose drinking water standards for at least five of them.

Aside from pharmaceuticals, many of the listed substances are pesticides, including the fumigant methyl bromide. Others are commercial chemicals, such as the octane booster methyl tert-butyl ether and hydrochlorofluorocarbon-22, which is used as a refrigerant and in tetrafluoroethylene polymers.

Also on the list are perfluoroctane sulfonic acid, which 3M phased out of its Scotchguard products in 2002, and perfluorooctanoic acid, used as a processing aid to produce polytetrafluoroethylene, such as DuPont's Teflon.

EPA says it selected the contaminants for the list after evaluating about 7,500 substances and biological agents.

The agency's full list of candidate contaminants is at www.epa.gov/safewater/ccl/ccl3.html.