

## **MCWA Discusses Pharmaceuticals in Water Supplies**

*Statement from Edward T. Marianetti, Executive Director*

Recently the AP published the results of their investigation into available test data showing that pharmaceutical residues can be measured in many drinking water supplies across the nation. These results highlight the need for the Federal government to move quickly to address the means and methods to protect our Nation's aquifers and waterways from such discharges. Water is one of our most precious natural resources; it serves as a source of our region's economic vitality, and we need to continue to step-up to address all new threats to its purity as they arise.

The regulatory agencies assure us that, while measurable with today's advanced technologies, they do not believe a public health hazard is present at these extremely minute levels. Nonetheless, the Water Authority will continue to work proactively and diligently to provide the area with a safe and secure water supply.

All of the state-of-the-art water treatment plants that supply our system include the process of adsorption, using granular activated carbon just prior to filtration. This process is known to be effective in the treatment of many pharmaceuticals and like constituents. Just recently, MCWA, as part of a team lead by an international consulting firm and the University of Illinois, was selected by the American Water Works Association Research Foundation to complete an evaluation of this process for treatment of trace organic contaminants. Sample collection and analysis is underway. This study will have national implications and will put us in the best possible position to understand and address this very important issue.

Our sampling and analysis programs have long gone far beyond that required by regulations. In 2007, we performed over 60,000 analyses on over 10,000 samples. Each year the summary of those results are mailed to each customer; more detailed results are available on our website. In the past, we have teamed with federal agencies to do sampling and analyses for other unregulated contaminants, work that is important in the process of developing new water quality regulations and is something needed again for EPA to address this issue.

The Water Authority urges the Federal government to take the lead in developing a national program to provide consumers with an easy way to dispose of unused prescriptions. Likewise, they should revise federal guidelines that currently encourage consumers to flush certain unused prescriptions down the sewer system. Congress should pass legislation directing EPA to promptly develop standards, and the corresponding laboratory methods, for discharges containing pharmaceuticals to the environment and for the testing of public water supplies for pharmaceuticals.

The Water Authority has been proactive in addressing water supply issues in the past: from addressing the threat of Zebra Mussels to our intakes, to establishing, as the Bureau of Water Supply Protection in Albany stated last year, "one of the most comprehensive water security programs in New York State", to implementing compliance measures relative to open reservoirs two years before required. We pledge to work with EPA to expedite their development of rules and/or guidance for the testing and treatment of potential pharmaceuticals in the water supply.