

## Tests show that drug residue is tainting water, report warns

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TORONTO -- Residues from drugs and cosmetics are widespread contaminants in Canadian waterways, and should be subject to increased oversight by regulators because they represent a possible health hazard, says a report released this week.

The report, by the Canadian Institute for Environmental Law and Policy, said tests of the past decade in the United States and Europe have found water to be laced with residues from cosmetics and 100 drugs, and while studies in Canada have not been as extensive, the situation is unlikely to be much different because of the high use of these products.

'It is reasonable to assume . . . that pharmaceuticals and other emerging contaminants are widely present in the streams, lakes, rivers and groundwater in the densely populated regions of the country,' the report states.

In 2004, Canadians filled just under 400 million prescriptions in drugstores. Large quantities of drugs are administered in hospitals and in farming, where antibiotics and growth hormones are used routinely on livestock to make them grow faster.

Fifty per cent to 90 per cent of the active ingredients in drugs are not absorbed by the bodies of humans or farm animals and are excreted, which means they enter sewage and from there are released into surface waters.

Joanne Parrott, an Environment Canada scientist, said water contamination by drug residues appears to be a localized problem. She said traces of drugs are usually found in sewage effluent or in rivers below sewage pipes. In larger rivers or lakes, residues are diluted to below detection levels because of the large volumes of water.

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