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IES LAUNCHES PROJECT TO REDUCE CONTAMINANTS IN DRINKING WATER

(Denver, Colorado) The Institute for Environmental Solutions (IES) has launched a project to identify pharmaceuticals and other contaminants in Colorado drinking water sources and reduce their accumulation through collaborative action by state and local government, relevant industries, and the scientific community.

“Recent studies have shown the presence of small amounts of everyday drugs and other household products in drinking water supplies across the nation, including here in Colorado,” said Carol Lyons, IES executive director. “There is growing concern among scientists that even small concentrations may be harmful to human health over the long term.”

Extensive research has been conducted into the presence of trace pharmaceutical and personal care product pollution in wastewater. Some local governments have offered pharmaceutical “take-back” programs in an attempt to reduce contamination. Through take-back programs, consumers are encouraged to return unused drugs to collection points for disposal. However, the effectiveness of these programs in reducing pollution is not known. The primary sources of downstream contamination has not been determined.

Pharmaceuticals and other pollutants are introduced into drinking water supplies through several channels. When consumed, medication is absorbed by the body, but some passes through and is flushed down the toilet. Detergents and numerous other household products also go down the drain. Pharmaceuticals that are thrown in the trash by households or commercial establishments are released into the environment through leaching in landfills. Contamination is also contributed from flame retardants, industrial processes, and agriculture.

The first step in the IES project, called Emerging Contaminants: Linking Science to Effective Action, is to establish a broad-based local stakeholder advisory group to determine the measurements needed to begin to establish effective pollution reduction strategies. IES plans to conduct a pilot pharmaceutical take-back program to measure this strategy's effectiveness. Several small communities in Boulder County are now being considered for the program. Before and after the take-back program, monitoring of discharges from nearby wastewater treatment facilities will be conducted to identify quantities and types of drugs being discharged.

Based on the results of the pilot phase, larger scale remedies can be designed for wider application. IES's Stakeholder Advisory Committee comprising representatives from a wide spectrum of organizations, including local and state government agencies, academic researchers, medical professionals, drug manufacturers, ecologists, local health care providers, water providers, water treatment facilities, and many others will guide the project.

The pilot phase of IES's Emerging Contaminants Project is partially funded by a grant from the Laura Jane Musser Fund. The pilot project schedule extends through August 2009.

The Institute for Environmental Solutions (IES) is a Denver-based non-project organization dedicated to addressing complex environmental challenges. IES uses sound, independent science to find potential solutions, develop objective evaluation methods, implement strategies, and measure and demonstrate costs and effectiveness. IES's approach emphasizes integration across technical disciplines and inclusion of all potential stakeholders throughout project design and implementation.

For more information about or to participate in the Emerging Contaminants Project and IES, please visit www.instituteforenvironmentalsolutions.org.

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