January 10, 2011

Dear County Executive and County Council Members:

On September 25, 2010, the Montgomery County Police Department (MCPD) participated in the first National Take Back Initiative, a national effort sponsored by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). By hosting two sites in Montgomery County, the MCPD provided residents with the opportunity to safely and securely dispose of unwanted and/or expired pharmaceuticals. Removing unwanted pharmaceuticals from medicine cabinets not only reduces the opportunity for potential drug abuse, but it also safeguards the County's drinking water sources and water quality by reducing improper disposal of pharmaceuticals. The Water Quality Advisory Group (WQAG) applauds the County, especially the MCPD, for participating in this recent event and supports future drug take-back events.

While these drug collection events are seen as a positive step in the reduction of pharmaceuticals discharged into regional and local waters, it is important to note that, to date, much is unknown about this phenomenon and further research is needed. A variety of pharmaceuticals have been detected at low levels in a number of water bodies nationwide as well as locally, but the potential impacts on human health and the environment are unclear. Unused pharmaceuticals are not the only source of pharmaceuticals in water bodies – research indicates that excretion of metabolized pharmaceuticals from humans into the sewers (where conventional wastewater treatment processes are not designed for total removal of pharmaceutical substances) is a major source, while agricultural sources including runoff of animal manure can also be a significant source. WSSC and other regional water utilities have participated in limited local monitoring and continue to support research at a national level via funding contributions to research institutions. In the meantime, the WQAG is exploring recommendations for enhancing the information available about pharmaceuticals in water for Montgomery County residents.

The WQAG endorses pharmaceutical collection events as a responsible way to dispose of unwanted or expired pharmaceuticals as well as reducing the loading of drugs to the sewers and consequently reducing their potential impact to local and regional drinking water sources and water bodies. The DEA is currently determining whether future events will be held. Should these events be offered, the WQAG supports the involvement of the MCPD and encourages the County leadership to participate in and promote the events.

Sincerely,

Daphne Pee
WQAG Co-Chair

Carol Henry
WQAG Co-Chair

WATER QUALITY ADVISORY GROUP

255 Rockville Pike, Suite 120 • Rockville, Maryland 20850 • 240-777-7700, FAX 240-777-7752