

Compiled by Williette Nyanue

# Keeping Up With the Contaminants

Emerging contaminants and incidental compounds discovered in drinking water supplies have sparked consumer concern throughout the U.S. *WQP* Associate Editor Williette Nyanue spoke with NSF Intl. drinking water expert Richard Andrew to find out what consumers are saying and how the new NSF/ANSI Standard 401 will help address these concerns.

**WILLIETTE NYANUE:** *What are emerging contaminants and incidental compounds?*

**RICHARD ANDREW:** When we conceived of this in 2008, we were thinking pharmaceuticals. But as the joint committee started working on the standard, it realized there were other categories of chemicals being detected—for example, flame retardants, pesticides, herbicides and compounds related to product manufacturing. They were showing up in source waters, not from a specific manufacturing plant, but almost ubiquitously, throughout many water supplies. That became this idea of emerging compounds and incidental contaminants. They are in the water; they are at very low concentrations and they are not coming from any specific contamination source.

**NYANUE:** *How do these contaminants and compounds enter the water supply?*

**ANDREW:** They are coming from residential, commercial and industrial wastewater. They are getting into the water supply because people have disposed of things down the toilet, or maybe they have even passed through our bodies and gotten into the wastewater stream that way, and wastewater and drinking water treatment plants do not have treatment that is adequate enough to treat these things at the parts-per-trillion level.

**NYANUE:** *What is the impact of these contaminants in drinking water sources?*

**ANDREW:** It is difficult to figure out if there are any effects or not when you are dealing with such low concentrations. I'm sure research will

continue—and maybe at some point they will [be deemed] a concern—but right now there is not a public health concern with these compounds being detected at low concentrations. Interestingly, when we did the survey we found that 82% of consumers were concerned about possible negative health affects of having these contaminants in their water. So, on the one hand you have the toxicology community and the experts saying these are really low levels that these compounds are being detected at. There is no documented health issue. [On the other hand], you have consumers thinking [they would] prefer to drink water that does not have this stuff in it.

**NYANUE:** *How will NSF/ANSI 401: Drinking Water Treatment Units - Emerging Contaminants/Incidental Compounds affect manufacturers?*

**ANDREW:** The standard deals with the ability of point-of-use products to effectively treat these types of really low-concentration compounds that are being detected. Manufacturers were already making claims that their products were effective in treating these types of compounds, but there was no official basis. There was no recognized consensus standard that would set the bar on what it takes to make a claim like that. What this standard does is create that formalized consensus generally accepted and a solid basis for making that type of claim. It really allows



Richard Andrew

that confidence all around from consumers to manufacturers to others in terms of the validity of these types of claims and the fact that they are being made in a consistent way.

**NYANUE:** *How has the rollout of the standard been thus far?*

**ANDREW:** We already have about 10 different manufacturers that are certified, and there are more than 50 products that already have the certification, so clearly there was some demand that was positioned out there right from the very publication of the standard.

I think, heading into next year, we are going to see more manufacturers and more products being tested to it. We have had quite a bit of demand. It is unusual for a new standard like this to see 10 certifications within a just a couple of months of publishing. We expect that this is the tip of the iceberg, and that we are going to see more and more certifications to this standard in the future. **WQP**

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