

In My Opinion

How Safe is Treated Willamette River Water?

BY **MARISSA HOULBERG**

“The Willamette River is not an homogenous pool of unchanging water,” explained Kim Anderson, director of OSU’s Food Safety and Environmental Stewardship Program. “Its chemistry changes in pulses, currents and seasonal differences that can concentrate some chemicals and dilute others. If you take a sample in the afternoon you could miss a pulse of chemicals released in the middle of the night.”

There are 84,000 chemical substances listed in our United States Toxic Substances Control

Act (TSCA) database, and the TSCA Inventory changes daily. Pesticides and drugs are not included in the database.

The US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) regulates only 91 drinking water contaminants. The testing frequency of these water contaminants vary from monthly, quarterly, yearly and some contaminants that can cause health effects from a very long-term exposure, for example arsenic, are sampled every year to every three years or longer.

The creation of drinking water regulations must include a thorough cost/benefit analysis and consideration of the best available technology. The EPA sets non-enforceable Maximum Contaminant Level Goals (MCLG) and only enforces

the less strict Maximum Contaminant Levels (MCL). The MCL regulations are lower because of the cost/benefit consideration and current treatment technology may not meet the MCLG.

The latest information from the EPA, Oregon Health Division and Oregon DEQ websites regarding chemicals, drinking water

regulations and contaminants of emerging concern continue to support the strategy to keep contaminants out of the source water. The Wilsonville Willamette Treatment Plant has no Source Water

Protection Plan.

The Willamette River on its way to the Wilsonville drinking water treatment plant receives agricultural and urban runoff in addition to point source pollution from industrial mixing zones and municipal sewage treatment plants. The cities of Springfield, Eugene, Corvallis, Albany, Salem, Keizer, and Newberg drain to the Willamette River watershed before reaching the Wilsonville Water Treatment Plant intake. The first accounting of pesticide use in the Willamette River basin in 2007 revealed nearly 9.7 million pounds of pesticides used.

The Willamette River is a second rate drinking water source.

