

***"Witch's brew of pharmaceuticals" entering and contaminating nation's waterways and putting public safety at risk***

WASHINGTON – Congresswoman Louise Slaughter, Ranking Member of the House Rules Committee, today said we must take action to reduce the threat posed by leftover prescription drugs to public health and safety.

Across the country, unused and expired pharmaceuticals are polluting our waterways, poisoning our children, and putting our public safety at risk.

Today, Slaughter announced that she has introduced H.R. 2939, the Pharmaceutical Stewardship Act, legislation that would provide Americans with a convenient way to safely dispose of their pharmaceuticals and ensure that they are kept out of drinking water and out of the hands of unsuspecting children or criminals.

"The need for a safe drug disposal program has never been greater," said Slaughter. "In a 2008 investigation, pharmaceutical contamination was found in 24 out of 28 metropolitan areas' drinking water. Worse yet, unused pharmaceuticals place a bulls-eye on the homes of the elderly for thieves, or can result in accidental overdose or death. The bill I introduce today would help solve this serious environmental, public health, and public safety concerns by providing Americans with a convenient way to safely dispose of unneeded prescription drugs."

Federal agencies from the Office of National Drug Control Policy to the Drug Enforcement Agency encourage Americans to use secure medicine take-back programs to return drugs for environmentally sound disposal. But these programs are few and far between, and communities are struggling to provide them.

This has resulted in improper disposal of unwanted prescriptions into our nations waterways. In 2002, the United States Geological Survey found that 80 percent of streams and 93 percent of groundwater was contaminated with at least one pharmaceutical. In 2008, an investigation found that at least 46 million Americans are exposed to prescription drugs through their drinking water.

"Aquatic wildlife, whole ecosystems, and our communities own drinking water can never escape this witch's brew of pharmaceuticals," added Slaughter.

The Pharmaceutical Stewardship Act would set up a nonprofit corporation financed by pharmaceutical producers which would be responsible for establishing comprehensive drug take-back programs in every state. The bill would also set up a commission to develop a strategy to prevent pharmaceutical contaminants from polluting our waterways and environments from production to disposal.

### **Already Gaining Support**

H.R. 2939 has been endorsed by several consumer advocacy and environmental organizations, including the Science and Management of Addictions, Product Stewardship Institute, Food and Water Watch, Natural Resources Defense Council, and Environment America.

"There is an urgent need for convenient drug take-back programs to protect public health and the environment, and this bill would significantly increase collection opportunities across the country," said Scott Cassel, Executive Director of the Product Stewardship Institute. "By adopting a product stewardship approach, this bill gives industry the control and flexibility it needs to implement an efficient and effective program."

"Abuse and addiction involving prescription drugs is devastating families and taking the lives of too many of our children," said Gina Grappone, Executive Director of Science and Management of Addictions. "Secure drug take-back programs are the right way to get medicines safely out of our homes. While they are a critical part of the solution, not enough communities can afford them. We applaud Representative Slaughter's legislation that calls on the pharmaceutical companies to be responsible partners with our communities to solve this problem."

"To help stem the flow of pharmaceuticals contaminating our waterways and drinking water, a system needs to be put in place that allows Americans to properly dispose of unwanted medicines," said Mae Wu of the National Resources Defense Council. "This bill provides a way to do that, and it also correctly assigns the responsibility for financing that system on those companies whose products create this environmental and public health problem, rather than taxpayers struggling to balance their checkbooks."

PUBLISHED SEPTEMBER 19, 2011