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The Campaign to End Antibiotic Overuse

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USGS Study Finds Antibiotics in 48% of Streams Tested in 30 States

Bush Budget Would Kill Program Responsible for Groundbreaking Report

Washington, DC - Antibiotics are found in 48 percent of 139 streams in 30 states, according to results from a new study by the United States Geological Survey (USGS).

"This is important new data," said Tamar Barlam, M.D., an infectious disease specialist at the Center for Science in the Public Interest. "We know that bacteria are more likely to become resistant to drugs the more they encounter antibiotics. The next step is to see if there is a connection with contamination of our waterways and antibiotic-resistant infections in people."

The study, simultaneously published in the scientific journal, *Environmental Science and Technology*, and posted to the USGS website (<http://toxics.usgs.gov>), looked for approximately 100 different contaminants in 139 streams in 30 states, including 62 downstream from agricultural operations. Included in this list of contaminants are 22 human and veterinary antibiotics. The USGS findings showed that 14 antibiotics used in human medicine and animal agriculture end up in our waterways.

"The USGS study shows that many antibiotics are moving through our environment in ways that weren't widely appreciated before," stated Mardi Mellon, Ph.D., senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

The Union of Concerned Scientists estimates that up to 70% of all antibiotics in the U.S. are given to healthy farm animals to promote growth and compensate for unsanitary growing conditions. Many of these antibiotics are the same as, or closely related to, medically important antibiotics. A significant proportion of the antibiotics given to farm animals are excreted in feces or urine, and this waste is stored in open lagoons and/or spread as fertilizer onto agricultural fields. Runoff, leakage or overflow can allow antibiotics to reach surface and groundwater and, potentially, drinking water sources.

The USGS Toxic Substances Hydrology Program – which produced the study – is the only national monitoring program of its kind in the U.S. The Bush Administration's proposed 2003 budget eliminates all funding for this project.

"Continuing this USGS program is critical for public health, but the President's proposed budget would eliminate it," said Rebecca Goldberg, Ph.D., senior scientist at Environmental Defense. "The USGS now has a combination of expertise and experience conducting these kinds of studies found nowhere else. If funding is abolished, the USGS' unique ability to perform these important studies will be lost."

In conjunction with the release of the USGS data, a letter, signed by close to 40 organizations, has been sent to each of the House and Senate subcommittees on Interior Appropriations requesting that full

funding be restored to the USGS program.

Environmental Defense, the Union of Concerned Scientists and the Center for Science in the Public Interest are members of “Keep Antibiotics Working (KAW): The Campaign to End Antibiotic Overuse.” KAW is a coalition of health, consumer, agricultural, environmental and other advocacy groups with more than nine million members dedicated to eliminating a major cause of antibiotic resistance—the inappropriate use of antibiotics in farm animals. For more information, visit www.KeepAntibioticsWorking.com, www.BayerWatch.com or www.AntibioticsPetition.com.