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News Release

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‘WONDER OF WATER’ IS THEME OF DRINKING WATER WEEK
It celebrates 30 years of Safe Drinking Water Act progress

FRANKFORT, Ky. (April 29, 2005) – Drinking Water Week begins May 1 with the theme “The Wonder of Water” – a theme designed to raise public awareness of drinking water issues but also to reflect on successes in the 30 years since President Gerald Ford signed the Safe Drinking Water Act into law on Dec. 16, 1974.

Today we can turn on a tap to get clean, safe water for cooking, drinking and bathing. It’s easy to overlook the fact that the water actually originated in a river, lake or aquifer.

Under the Act, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) established federal, enforceable health standards for contaminants in drinking water. Interim standards were set for 18 contaminants in 1975. The number grew to 90 when the Act was amended in 1996. The number could reach 130 by 2010.

The EPA also set guidelines – national secondary drinking water standards – for contaminants that may have adverse cosmetic effects such as skin or tooth discoloration, or aesthetic effects such as taste, odor or color, in drinking water.

The EPA requires that each state adopt and administer rules that are at least as stringent as federal requirements. The Kentucky Division of Water (DOW) has had full authority and responsibility, called “primacy,” for implementation of the Act since 1977. As a condition of primacy, DOW develops regulations for applying any new or amended federal rules to Kentucky systems.

Public health protection has been, and remains, the national drinking water program’s most important focus. Thirty-one outbreaks of disease associated with drinking water were reported by 19 states in 2001 and 2002 – 19 outbreaks the first year and 12 the second.

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That compared with 39 outbreaks during 1999-2000, according to a report by the federal Centers for Disease Control in October. It was a far cry from the plague of waterborne illnesses that occurred before drinking water was treated.

We still have much to learn about the health effects of drinking water contaminants, testing and treatment technologies. As EPA continues to develop standards, increased attention will focus on source water protection and preventing contaminants, such as pharmaceuticals, from getting into drinking water. These standards will require a great deal of research to determine if pharmaceutical contaminants constitute a threat to treated drinking water. We all can take one preventive step: Stop flushing medicines down the toilet.

Consumers' actions affect the quality of source water and the level of treatment required to provide safe drinking water. To keep drinking water safe and treatment costs down, consumers need to be aware that what we do to the land affects everyone's drinking water sources.

Visit these Web sites for more information about drinking water and its history:

- Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA): <http://www.water.ky.gov/dw/techdoc/SDWA.htm> This site includes SDWA milestones, highlights from the 1996 amendments to the SDWA and additional Internet resources about drinking water.
- Contaminants and their potential health effects: <http://www.epa.gov/safewater/consumer/mcl.pdf>

Call the Drinking Water Hotline at 1-800-426-4791 for any questions about drinking water.