

**STATEMENT OF
THE HONORABLE EDDIE BERNICE JOHNSON
WATER RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE HEARING ON
EMERGING CONTAMINANTS IN U.S. WATERS
SEPTEMBER 18, 2008**

Today's hearing looks at the extensive range of emerging contaminants that are present in our surface waters. Many of these substances are either unregulated or under-regulated, and include toxic chemicals, pesticides, pharmaceuticals, and nano-materials.

As many of you know, I spent my early professional years as a nurse. It's from this experience that I have been very mindful of threats – especially unnecessary threats – to human health.

However, I am concerned with the growing body of evidence on the presence of toxic chemicals and their by-products in the nation's waters, and question just how safe our waters actually are – especially to human health over the long term.

While the Clean Water Act was successful in controlling some substances, it is clear that today's contaminants of concern are not the pollutants of yesteryear.

For example, there are currently 80,000 chemicals in use. This is a three-fold increase from 1941 to 1995. 8,000 of these are known to be carcinogens.

One would hope that all of these 8,000 cancer-causing poisons are somehow addressed under federal and state authorities, including the Clean Water Act. Shockingly, this is not the case. It seems that less than 300 chemicals have permit limits.

Today's hearing provides us with the opportunity to ask why this is the case.

It's not as if emerging contaminants are new issues of concern for either the Congress or EPA. In 1996, through the Food Quality Protection and the Safe Drinking Water Acts, the Congress instructed EPA to develop a screening program to determine if certain chemicals and compounds disrupt hormones in humans. In the 12 years since this mandate was put forward, the Agency has not begun to test any chemicals under this program, despite the potential for these chemicals and compounds to cause great harms to individuals – especially to children and pregnant women.

Testimony from the U.S. Geological Survey will demonstrate that these endocrine disrupting chemicals – and many other toxic substances – are in our surface waters. Not only have they been demonstrated to harm aquatic life, they have the grave potential to harm humans.

I look forward to hearing from our witnesses today about how these chemicals, these emerging contaminants, are getting into our waters.

Our former Defense Secretary, Don Rumsfeld, famously stated:

There are known knowns...There are known unknowns...But there are also unknown unknowns.

While perhaps a clever quip, we certainly saw how a reliance on such platitudes rendered our situation in Iraq during his tenure. We would certainly hope that our nation's Environmental Protection Agency is not taking the same approach with regards to unregulated toxic chemicals.

Frankly, when it comes to the health of the very young, to pregnant women, and to the elderly, there is no excuse for not knowing.

I look forward to the testimony from our witnesses today on this very important hearing. I now yield to the Subcommittee's Ranking Member, Mr. Boozman.