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Advances in Water Security

Sarantuyaa Zandaryaa  
Ali Fares  
Gabriel Eckstein *Editors*

# Emerging Pollutants

Protecting Water Quality for the Health  
of People and the Environment

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# **Advances in Water Security**

## **Series Editor**

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Water security is vital to a sustainable and secure future of any nation. Addressing water security issues requires: i) a multidisciplinary approach involving highly skilled scientific and technical experts; and ii) substantial long-term funding with little or no-return in the short term. This series has been established as an advanced forum for hydrologists, technologists, policy makers, planners, and other users to discuss the latest innovations, uses and application of new techniques, and policies in dealing with water security in more comprehensive approaches. Topics for volumes in the series include basics of water security; water security and climate change; agriculture and water security; international law and water security; energy security and water security; development and water; analyzing and quantifying the linkage between water and food security; water availability and demand; water and food security considering spatial and temporal variability; analysis of trans-boundary water management and water security; water security adaptation to climate change and variability in land use systems; human dimensions of water security including determinants of water consumption behaviors; big data and water security; water security and technological advances in water sensing technologies such as remote sensing (e.g., LIDAR - Light Detection and Ranging, passive remote sensing, thermal infrared data, passive microwave data, visible and microwave data, visible and near-infrared data), ground penetrating radar, in-situ electromagnetic sensors (e.g., Time domain reflectometry (TDR), Time domain transmission (TDT), frequency domain (e.g., capacitance sensor), the neutron scattering, fiber-optic sensors, and heat dissipative sensors. Proposals for volumes should include as much information as possible, and should be sent to the series editor – Ali Fares (Alfares@PVAMU.Edu) or Senior Publishing Editor - Margaret Deignan ([Margaret.Deignan@springer.com](mailto:Margaret.Deignan@springer.com)).



Sarantuyaa Zandaryaa · Ali Fares · Gabriel Eckstein  
Editors

# Emerging Pollutants

Protecting Water Quality for the Health  
of People and the Environment



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## SHORT SUMMARY

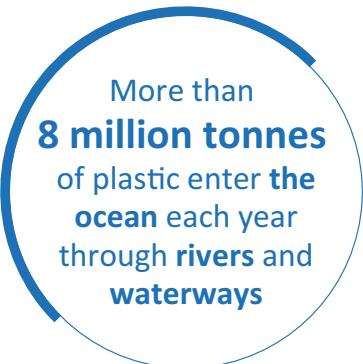
# Emerging Water Pollutants: Advancing Science to Shape Policies

Water is vital for life on Earth. Water quality is declining worldwide, threatening human health, food security, ecosystems, and biodiversity. The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals recognize the crucial need to provide **access to safe water—a fundamental human right**—and protect the world’s water resources from pollution.

Water quality management has historically focused on pathogens, nutrients, and heavy metals. A new class of pollutants known as emerging pollutants has garnered increasing attention due to potential risks to human health and ecosystems. Emerging pollutants, which include pharmaceuticals, personal care products, endocrine-disrupting compounds, chemicals, microorganisms, and micro- and nano-plastics, are found in water resources and known to cause chronic toxicity and endocrine disruption in humans and aquatic wildlife, and the development of bacterial pathogen resistance.

Limited knowledge about emerging pollutants hinders the development of appropriate regulatory, monitoring, prevention, and control measures.

UNESCO promotes research, knowledge generation and dissemination, capacity building, and awareness of emerging water pollutants. This book presents state-of-the-art research findings and proposes science-based policy recommendations on managing emerging pollutants toward sustainable water management and healthy ecosystems in the face of global changes and evolving environmental threats.



More than  
**8 million tonnes**  
of plastic enter the  
ocean each year  
through rivers and  
waterways



*"Since wars begin in the minds of men and women it is in the minds of men and women that the defences of peace must be constructed"*

# Foreword

Water, the source of life on Earth, is essential for ecosystems, biodiversity, human well-being, food security, social and economic activities. Protecting and sustainably managing water resources are, therefore, the foundation for the sustainable development of societies. Yet, the world's water resources are increasingly threatened by pollution, unsustainable use and climate change. New and emerging pollutants further exacerbate water pollution, adversely affecting both natural ecosystems and human health.

This publication is timely and essential on emerging water pollutants. Rapid industrialisation, urban expansion, and intense agricultural activities have introduced a wide and complex array of new contaminants into freshwater bodies, posing human health and ecological risks that often go unnoticed until it is too late.

The Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP)—UNESCO's international scientific cooperative program in water research, water resource management, water education, and capacity-building, and the only broadly-based science programme of the UN system in this area—has been at the forefront of addressing water-related issues for over five decades now. It fosters scientific collaboration and interdisciplinary research to support countries in enhancing their capacities to monitor, manage and protect water quality, promoting the sustainable use of this vital resource for sustainable development. In particular, IHP has been championing research promotion, knowledge generation, and capacity building on emerging pollutants during the past decade.

This critical book reflects our restless commitment to advancing scientific understanding of emerging pollutants, a crucial resource for scientists, policymakers, and practitioners. By integrating scientific knowledge with practical applications, this publication aims to foster a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of water, health, and the environment. The chapters within this book explore the sources and effects of emerging water pollutants and highlight the urgent need for decision-makers to fully understand and rapidly exploit these trustful scientific findings to act and design comprehensive strategies to preserve ecosystems and protect people's health.

I invite you to delve into this critical collective work and join us in pleading for urgent action to protect and better manage our water resources for a cleaner, healthier, and more sustainable world.

Lidia Brito  
Assistant Director-General for Natural  
Sciences of UNESCO

# Preface

Pollutants of emerging concern are a wicked problem. New and emerging pollutants are known to be harmful to people and the environment. These substances are used and released continuously into the environment, even in low quantities. Some may cause chronic toxicity and endocrine disruption in humans and aquatic wildlife and contribute to anti-microbial-resistant pathogens. Yet, the sheer number and diversity of these contaminants and the complexities of their origins, transport, toxicity, chronic effects, intermixing, cumulative effects, and elimination make it especially challenging to formulate appropriate policy responses.

Current knowledge of the extent of human and ecosystem health risks posed by emerging pollutants is inadequate. Moreover, most emerging pollutants found in the environment are not regulated through environmental, water quality, wastewater discharge, or health impact regulations. Similarly, regulations for monitoring or tracing the origin or fate of these substances are lacking. Traditional water treatment technologies often fail to remove emerging pollutants, highlighting the need for advanced research and effective monitoring and control measures. As a result, there is an urgent need to implement appropriate measures and policies to reduce emerging pollutants and associated threats to humans and ecosystems. In particular, more research and action are needed to: strengthen scientific knowledge and adopt appropriate technological and policy approaches to monitor emerging pollutants in water resources and wastewater; assess the potential human health and environmental risks posed by emerging pollutants; prevent and control the disposal of emerging pollutants into water resources and the environment; and develop regulations to mitigate and prevent the introduction of these pollutants in the aquatic environment.

Aiming to achieve some of these goals, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), through its Intergovernmental Hydrological Programme (IHP) and jointly with the International Water Resources Association, organized an online conference under the theme of *Emerging Pollutants: Protecting Water Quality for the Health of People and the Environment* in January 2023. The conference highlighted research findings, approaches, methodologies, technologies, and policies that communities worldwide can use to advance knowledge and research, identify solutions, and develop policies for managing pollutants of emerging concern in the aquatic environment.

Aligned with the theme of Springer series *Advances in Water Security*, this book focuses on protecting water quality from emerging pollutants. It features selected contributions presented at the conference and proposes science-based policy recommendations. A few exceptional articles were also invited to enrich this compilation of research and scientific studies on emerging water pollutants. The book emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary scientific collaboration, innovative policies, and

adaptive governance. It is an important, comprehensive knowledge resource for policymakers, researchers, and stakeholders to manage emerging pollutants and mitigate associated risks.

As the series and book editors and the conference's International Scientific Committee co-chairs, we are grateful for the excellent contributions of all authors, as well as for the scientific work of researchers worldwide who dedicate their expertise and research in various disciplines to advancing knowledge in this developing area of crucial importance. Their efforts are indispensable to the global efforts to find solutions to improve and protect water quality and manage emerging pollutants in our changing world. Only through better knowledge, scientific evidence, and collaborative efforts will we be able to identify sustainable solutions to the wicked problem of pollutants of emerging concern.

Lead editor of this book Dr Sarantuyaa Zandaryaa, who coordinated UNESCO IHP Theme on Water Quality during IHP-VII and IHP-VIII phases, recalls UNESCO's pioneering role in research promotion and knowledge generation on emerging water pollutants, which began as a case study back in 2011 and evolved into the implementation of a comprehensive UNESCO project in 2015–2018 dedicated to scientific cooperation, research, policy development, capacity building, and awareness raising on emerging pollutants and microplastics in freshwater resources. UNESCO's work on emerging pollutants catalyzed and fostered a rich landscape of research in various scientific disciplines across world's regions investigating different aspects of emerging pollutants and exploring solutions for addressing this global concern. As this book elucidates, the scientific advancements in understanding human and environmental health effects of emerging pollutants reflect not only the dedication of researchers worldwide but also the critical role that international scientific cooperation plays in tackling global environmental challenges. Through the concerted efforts facilitated by UNESCO, a dynamic field of study has emerged, positioning the global scientific community at the forefront of addressing the complexities posed by these new and emerging pollutants. As the world is facing increasingly acute challenges associated with climate change, population growth, and pollution, the insights provided in this book are more crucial than ever. Readers will discover not only state-of-the-art research findings but key policy recommendations guiding action.

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# Contents

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction—Emerging Pollutants in Water: Threats, Challenges, and Research Needs .....</b>	<b>1</b>
	Sarantuya Zandaryaa, Ali Fares, and Gabriel Eckstein	
<b>Part I Emerging Pollutants in Aquatic Ecosystems</b>		
<b>2</b>	<b>Occurrence of Pesticides and Emerging Contaminants in the Pampulha Lake: Anthropic Pollution of a UNESCO Heritage Site .....</b>	<b>11</b>
	Ramon Domingues, Mariana A. Dias, Camila Leite Madeira, Maria Clara V. M. Starling, Thiago de A. Neves, and Cassiana C. Montagner	
<b>3</b>	<b><i>Campylobacter</i>—an Emerging Pollutant of Aquatic Environments .....</b>	<b>35</b>
	Mary Chibwe, Oghenekaro Nelson Odume, and Chika Felicitas Nnadozie	
<b>4</b>	<b>Odor-Causing Compounds in Drinking Water: Occurrence and Sources in Major Cities Across China .....</b>	<b>67</b>
	Chunmiao Wang, Jianwei Yu, and Min Yang	
<b>5</b>	<b>Assessment of Harmful Algae as an Emerging Pollutant in Domestic Water Supply from Rainwater Harvesting Facilities in Sudan .....</b>	<b>89</b>
	Wifag Hassan Mahmoud, Sabry Zagloul Wahba, and Muna Mohammed Musnad	
<b>6</b>	<b>Prioritization of Chemicals in Aquatic Ecosystems in Türkiye .....</b>	<b>109</b>
	Esra Şiltu, Sibel Mine Güçver, Gülnur Ölmez, Burcu Cömert, and Aybala Koç Orhon	

**7 Evolution of Water Research in South Africa from Legacy Pollutants to Contaminants of Emerging Concern: Successes and Opportunities .....** 131  
Nonhlanhla Kalebaila and Samkelisiwe Hlophe-Ginindza

## **Part II Emerging Pollutants and Groundwater**

**8 Emerging Pollutants in Groundwater: The Origin, Transport Pathways, Remediation, and Challenges .....** 161  
Zehao Chen, Yinuo Wang, Junyuan Zhang, and Hongbin Zhan

**9 Emerging Contaminants in Groundwater: Challenges, Management, and Policy Perspectives .....** 189  
Roya Narimani, Ioana Murgulet, and Dorina Murgulet

**10 Examining the Potential Spread of Antibiotic Resistance in Groundwater Originating from Artificial Recharge .....** 227  
Brandon Hardiman and Itza Mendoza-Sanchez

## **Part III Emerging Pollutants and Managing Wastewater and Waste**

**11 Emerging Pollutants—Pitfalls in Their Removal: A Case Study .....** 253  
Hajar Farzaneh, Jayaprakash Saththasivam, and Gordon McKay

**12 Removal of Pharmaceutical Contaminants from Wastewater Using Novel Ceramic Nanomembrane Filters .....** 271  
Edith Nwakaego Chima, Helen M. K. Essandoh, Regina E. Edziyie, Omagbemi Omoloju Yaya, and Nwude O. Micheal

**13 Emerging Pollutants in Wastewater: A Challenge for Water Reuse .....** 297  
Sabrine Hattab, Chayma Alaya, and Mohamed Banni

## **Part IV A Circular Economy Approach: Lifecycle Management of Emerging Pollutants**

**14 Management of Emerging Pollutants with a Circular Economy Approach: Lessons from Developed Countries and a Case Study in Northern Cyprus .....** 317  
Farhad Bolouri, Hüseyin Gökçekuş, and Vahid Nourani

**15 Reverse Logistics in the Disposal of Empty Pesticide Packaging—A Case Study in the Municipality of Ibirama, Santa Catarina, Brazil .....** 333  
Maria Pilar Serbent, Camila Schwarz Pauli, Anderson Fozina Krüger, and Willian Jucelio Goetten

**16 Microalgae as Bio-based Circular Solutions for Harmful Algal Bloom (HAB) in Lake Tegel, Berlin, Germany** ..... 343  
Kei Namba and Armin Dolatimehr

**17 Spatio-Temporal Assessment of Chlorine Residuals in the Water Distribution System of Dhaka City** ..... 373  
Md. Mezanur Rahaman, Atikur Rahman, and Tanvir Ahmed

## **Part V Priority Emerging Pollutants in the Hydrocycle**

**18 Curbing the Environmental Implications of Emerging Nano-Pollutants: Current Developments in Preventing Environmental Exposure Potential and Adverse Effects** ..... 405  
Mbuyiselwa Shadrack Moloi, Thabiso Mzinyati,  
Raisibe Florence Lehutso, Paul J. Oberholster, and Melusi Thwala

**19 Direct Potable Reuse: A Prioritization of Emerging Contaminants for Monitoring Strategies and Pilot-Scale Advanced Treatment** ..... 425  
Vinicius Diniz, Jarbas José Rodrigues Rohwedder,  
and Susanne Rath

**20 Prioritization of Emerging Pollutants Used for Fingerprinting Specific Water Sources** ..... 447  
Olutobi Daniel Ogunbiyi, Maria Guerra de Navarro,  
Carolina Cuchimaque Lugo, Courtney Heath,  
Joshua Omaojo Ocheje, Luciana Teresa Dias Cappelini,  
and Natalia Quinete

## **Part VI Key Policy Messages and Recommendations**

**21 Science-Based Policy Recommendations for Managing Emerging Pollutants: Protecting Water Quality for the Health of People and the Environment** ..... 487  
Sarantuya Zandaryaa, Ali Fares, Gabriel Eckstein,  
Regina M. Buono, Mary Trudeau, James E. Nickum,  
Xinghui Xia, Atikur Rahman, Marijn Kornbewal,  
Cassiana C. Montagner, Piero R. Gardinali,  
Robert Michael Di Filippo, and Anoop Veettil