

**Opening Statement of the Honorable John Shimkus
Subcommittee on Environment and the Economy
Hearing on “H.R. 212, the Drinking Water Protection Act”
February 5, 2015**

(As Prepared for Delivery)

Today, we examine legislation that creates a framework for better understanding and addressing the risk posed by algal toxins that can show up in some drinking water. I thank Representative Latta for his efforts on this issue and for bringing it to the subcommittee’s attention last fall.

Some folks may be tempted to think there are easy solutions to this problem, but from our hearing this past November, we learned we have a long way to go to understand it. The diversity of algae and their habitats only complicate the problem.

The legislation we are reviewing moves in the right direction.

First, the legislation requires EPA, within 90 days, to develop and submit a strategic plan to Congress for assessing and managing risks from cyanotoxins in drinking water provided by public water systems. This plan will detail the six critical steps as well as the timelines EPA intends to use to:

- Identify information gaps to be filled and evaluate human health risks,
- publish a comprehensive list of algal toxins that are harmful as well as what those harmful effects are,
- identify what makes these algae harmful,
- determine how to use public health advisories to inform testing and monitoring of these algal toxins, as well as look at where EPA needs better information for testing and monitoring,
- suggest treatment options, and
- provide technical assistance to states and public water systems.

Most importantly, this strategic plan is a living document and can be updated as warranted after the deadline expires.

H.R. 212 also calls on EPA to consult with other Federal agencies, states, and others actively analyzing cyanotoxins and their impact on public health, and to publish the information possessed by the Federal government.

Finally, H.R. 212 requires the Government Accountability Office to inventory and report to Congress on Federal spending, between fiscal years 2010 and 2014, on analyses and public health efforts of the Federal government on cyanotoxins, including the specific purpose for which the funds were made available, the law under which the funds were authorized, the Federal agency that received or spent the funds, and recommended steps to reduce any duplication, and improve interagency coordination, of such expenditures.

I want to welcome and thank our witnesses who are joining, or rejoining us today, as the case may be. We look forward to hearing from them on what happened this past August in Ohio, and what lessons were learned and whether H.R. 212 helps. We’ll also get a better sense of what drinking water treatment professionals need to better prepare to handle these events.

###