

FDA Reports Perchlorate Widespread; Millions of Children at Risk from Exposure Levels

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NEWS RELEASE
Committee on Energy and Commerce

Rep. John D. Dingell, Chairman

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Key Lawmakers Call for Legislation to Ensure Drinking Water Safe from Rocket Fuel

Washington, D.C. – A report published by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) found that nearly 300 commonly consumed foods and beverages are contaminated with perchlorate, a component of rocket-fuel. According to health data, this contamination is at levels that place the health of millions of young children at risk every day. Every proposed or final drinking water standard, except one, the Massachusetts standard of two parts per billion, fails to protect two-year olds from routine, daily, unsafe exposure to perchlorate when combined food and water exposures are considered.

Key Members of the House Energy and Commerce Committee's Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials said today that the new FDA study demonstrates conclusively the need for a national standard to limit the amount of perchlorate in drinking water.

“For almost a decade, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has refused to set a drinking water standard for perchlorate, opting instead for further study. This delay has come at the cost of the health of millions of our country’s most vulnerable citizens,” said Rep. Al Wynn (D-MD), the Chairman of the Subcommittee on Environment and Hazardous Materials. “The publication of the FDA study leaves no doubt that a standard limiting the amount of perchlorate in our nation’s drinking water is warranted without further delay.”

Congresswoman Hilda L. Solis (D-CA), Vice Chair of the Environment and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee, has authored legislation (H.R. 1747) that would amend the Safe Drinking Water Act to require the EPA to create a national drinking water standard for perchlorate, legislation co-sponsored by Wynn.

“For more than ten years the EPA has failed to take action to protect communities from exposure to perchlorate,” said Solis. “The FDA report is further evidence that perchlorate is widespread. Without a national drinking water standard, young children and other vulnerable persons will be exposed to this contaminant, posing unnecessary risks to their health. We must take action to protect public health by establishing a national drinking water standard which is health protective. I hope my colleagues will join me in moving swiftly to enact H.R. 1747, legislation I introduced to establish a safe drinking water standard.”

The FDA study examined 285 common foods and beverages in connection with its annual Total Dietary Study, finding that perchlorate was present in 74 percent of the foods and beverages that the study examined. The study suggests that the pervasiveness of perchlorate in food presents serious health risks to the population, particularly children. For example, according to the FDA study, every day the average two-year old is exposed to one half of EPA’s preliminary reference dose, a level of contamination that the EPA estimates will have no adverse health effects, through food alone.

Perchlorate is an ingredient in rocket fuel, 90 percent of which is produced for use by the United States Department of Defense and NASA. Perchlorate presents a risk to human health in vulnerable populations, including pregnant women and children, as it blocks the ability of the thyroid to absorb iodine. Normal thyroid hormones levels are critical for a healthy metabolism and normal brain and organ function and development. In 2006, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that perchlorate exposure was widespread in our population and that children ages 6 to 11, had 65 percent more perchlorate than adults aged 20 years and older. The CDC studies also concluded that perchlorate at high levels causes decreases in thyroid function.

In addition to the perchlorate food contamination, perchlorate has been detected in drinking water in at least 35 States and the District of Columbia and is known to have contaminated 153 public drinking water systems in 26 States with concentrations ranging from 4 parts per billion (ppb) to more than 420 ppb.

When the average child consumes perchlorate contaminated drinking water either alone or with perchlorate contaminated food, the amount of ingested perchlorate has the potential to exceed nearly every one of the proposed or final state drinking water standards, except the Massachusetts standard of two ppb, thereby subjecting them to the adverse health effects of perchlorate. Because perchlorate is pervasive in our food and drinking water, there is a clear need to protect public health by setting a drinking water standard.

“The health risks from environmental exposure to perchlorate are as serious as those posed by mercury in our food and water and lead contamination in paint,” Wynn added. “Perchlorate exposure puts millions of children at risk because it can erode brain development, learning and intelligence.”

“The bill, the Safe Drinking Water for Healthy Communities Act (H.R. 1747), passed the Environment and Hazardous Materials Subcommittee on November 8, 2007 by voice vote and is pending in the full Committee on Energy and Commerce.

US Food and Drug Administration's Total Dietary Study: Dietary intake of perchlorate and iodine »

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Prepared by the Committee on Energy and Commerce

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