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## **Bush Administration plans To Seek Scientific Study on EPA Perchlorate Toxicity Data**

EPA and other federal agencies are preparing to ask the National Academy of Science (NAS) to review the data the agency used in its draft risk assessment of Perchlorate, a component of rocket and missile fuel that is raising growing concern about groundwater and drinking water contamination.

The forthcoming request follows wide-ranging interagency talks aimed at resolving "serious science policy concern" from the Defense Department over EPA'S draft risk assessment, which recommends a one part-per-billion (ppb) drinking water level -- and cleanup goal -- for the chemical.

While it is not clear how long the NAS review will take, Sen. Barbara Boxer (D-CA), whose home state faces numerous cases of Perchlorate contamination, recently introduced legislation requiring EPA to set a drinking water standard, known as a maximum contaminant level (MCL), for perchlorate by July 2004.

But an EPA Region 9 spokesman says the agency will not have an MCL until 2007 at the earliest.

Paul Gilman, EPA'S research chief and science advisor, told InsideEPA March 7 that EPA has prepared a draft charge and that the NAS will definitely review the perchlorate evaluation. Sources say that EPA Deputy Administrator Linda Fisher was scheduled to discuss the draft charge with White House officials March 10.

The effort to ask NAS to review EPA'S data follows a series of talks between officials from EPA, Department of Energy, National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the White House's Council on Environmental Quality and Office of Management and Budget, according to Raymond DuBois, deputy under secretary of Defense for installations and environment.

Testifying before the Senate Armed Services readiness and management support subcommittee March 6, DuBois said some states are moving ahead to set their own limits for Perchlorate, but he said these efforts are bad on a misinterpretation of the EPA reference dose included in the draft risk assessment. The reference dose corresponds to a range of acceptable levels and "is merely the starting place for setting drinking water levels," he said.

"We've excited the American people with little science to back it up, " H.T. Johnson, acting secretary of the Navy, said at the same hearing.

Subcommittee Chairman John Ensign (R-NV) said he is concerned about the perchlorate fight. He said he is sensitive to the need to regulate perchlorate, but that regulation "must be based on sound science." Sen. James Inhofe (R-OK), chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works committee and a member of the readiness subcommittee, echoed Ensign in saying, "All we're asking for is sound science."

Meanwhile, Boxer March 3 introduced legislation to designate perchlorate as a contaminant and to establish an MCL by July 1, 2004. Under EPA'S current schedule, 2006 is the earliest date a standard would be finished, according to Boxer. EPA, in January, directed its regions in the meantime to use a 1999 interim guidance with a 4-188 ppb cleanup goal.

"Perchlorate is a clear and present danger to California's public health. We cannot wait four more years to address this threat," Boxer said on the Senate floor when she introduced the bill, S. 502. "EPA needs to get moving and protect our drinking water sooner rather than later." At least 81 drinking water systems in California are contaminated with perchlorate, according to the Environmental Working Group (EWG).

EWG, in a March 3 press release, called Boxer's legislation " a long-overdue step toward addressing a toxic legacy of the Cold War that poses a health risk to Americans from California to Cape Cod. " Bill Walker, EWG's West Coast vice president, added, "Now the Pentagon and the defense industry must stop trying to block safety standards and cleanup of contaminated sites, and let the EPA do its job of protecting the public. " EWG says that to protect children, EPA's perchlorate standard should be no higher than 0.1 ppb.

EWG says perchlorate is known or suspected to be a contaminant "in hundred of locations in 43 states." Outside of California, perchlorate contamination has been confirmed in more than 100 drinking water sources in 19 states, and perchlorate contamination of soil or groundwater sources not used for drinking water has been confirmed at more than 50 sites in 17 states, the group says.

"National contamination data is still spotty, but extensive drinking water testing is now underway," EWG said. The group says that one of those contamination sites is the McGregor Naval Weapons Plant in central Texas, which only a few miles from President Bush's ranch in Crawford.

EWG also said, "Perchlorate testing is urgently needed on at least 63 military sites in 32 states where rockets, missiles or munitions have been developed, produced, tested, stored, maintained, or disposed of. To date, testing is planned at only a few of these sites." DOD policy allows testing for perchlorate only if there is a "reasonable basis to suspect both a potential presence of perchlorate and a pathway on their installations where it could threaten public health."