

Reference

**Subject:** Perchlorate - Sac Bee - Some Industry Reaction

**Date:** Tue, 29 Jan 2002 13:30:34 -0600

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----- Forwarded by Debra Tellez/R6/USEPA/US on 01/29/02 01:28 PM -----

Kevin Mayer

01/29/02  
01:27 PM

To: Debra Tellez/R6/USEPA/US@EPA  
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Subject: Perchlorate - Sac Bee - Some  
Reaction

Industry

I will send you several recent articles from Region 9

----- Forwarded by Kevin Mayer/R9/USEPA/US on 01/29/2002 11:26 AM -----

Kevin Mayer

01/28/2002  
07:50 AM

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Subject: Perchlorate - Sac Bee - Some  
Reaction

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Industry

Sacramento Bee - Monday, January 28, 2002

<http://www.sacbee.com/content/news/story/1541077p-1617493c.html>

Two more wells may face closure



9858

Proposed perchlorate rules are exceeded in Rancho Cordova.

By Chris Bowman -- Bee Staff Writer  
Published 5:30 a.m. PST Monday, Jan. 28, 2002

At least two drinking water wells in Rancho Cordova contain a rocket fuel chemical at levels higher than the federal government recently recommended as safe.

The new health risk assessment has prompted the Arden-Cordova Water Service to consider closing the wells, according to the federal Environmental Protection Agency, which led the four-year study.

The additional closures would bring to 11 the number of wells the private utility has disconnected because of groundwater tainted with perchlorate, the main ingredient of solid rocket propellant. Last fall, the utility warned its 40,000 customers they could run short of water this summer.

If adopted by the EPA, the lower perchlorate safety level would lay the foundation for the setting of national and state drinking-water standards.

It also would drive up the cost and extent of groundwater cleanup in at least 20 states with sites contaminated with perchlorate, which has seeped into groundwater.

One of the most polluted sites is Aerojet, the Rancho Cordova rocket manufacturer responsible for polluting the community's groundwater with rocket fuel and industrial chemicals.

An industry group representing Aerojet and other users and makers of perchlorate contend the health studies do not support tightening the standard.

The EPA recommended limiting perchlorate in drinking water to nearly undetectable levels earlier this month after determining the contaminant is more harmful than previously thought.

Perchlorate, a chemical salt manufactured mainly for rocket propulsion but also for fireworks and even auto air bags, doesn't break down in soil or water and bypasses conventional drinking water filtration systems.

Scientists have known for years that high amounts of perchlorate can stunt brain development in early childhood. Perchlorate also impairs the thyroid gland, which controls growth, and can cause cancer in adults.

But tests conducted in the past two years confirmed that perchlorate impaired brain development in laboratory rats at dosages significantly lower than those in earlier experiments, said Annie Jarabek, an EPA toxicologist.

"We have more studies and better data now to show that these lower levels are of concern," Jarabek said.

An industry coalition contends results from recent human experiments give the EPA ample evidence to recommend a safe level of perchlorate in drinking water.

"We are disappointed that the EPA relied on the rat to determine the health effects when they had human data," said Michael Girard, an Aerojet official who heads industry's Perchlorate Study Group, formed to provide the EPA with perchlorate test data.

EPA scientists, however, found the human studies riddled with "significant" scientific weakness and generally unreliable for determining a safe dose, according to the agency's newly released perchlorate risk assessment.

The EPA said it precluded some industry-funded studies from consideration because they violated the agency's code of ethics on human experimentation. New human data offered by the Air Force, however, confirmed that humans are as sensitive as rats to some critical effects of perchlorate, the agency report said.

The EPA recommendation calls for lowering the perchlorate level deemed safe in drinking water from 32 parts per billion to 1 ppb. For children, the contamination should be no higher than 0.3 ppb, compared with the previous standard of 10 ppb set in 1998.

The recommendation stems from studies performed under a rigorous testing strategy designed by a consortium of scientists from several government agencies, including the Department of Defense, which has several contaminated sites.

Adoption of the safety level is the first step in a years-long national process of determining whether the EPA should set an enforceable federal drinking water standard for perchlorate.

Health risks generally drive most of the debate, but the costs of additional testing and treatment also are weighed in setting the allowable contamination level. The EPA has scheduled a public workshop in Sacramento on March 5 and 6 to discuss the proposed perchlorate guideline.

Though only advisory, the EPA safety level can still have a profound effect on water suppliers and industries using perchlorate.

California state health officials responded immediately by lowering their "action level" on the drinking water contaminant from 18 ppb to 4 ppb, the current detection limit for public water treatment plants.

Arden-Cordova Water Service reported perchlorate levels up to 15 ppb in a well on Alicante Way and up to 5.4 ppb at a well on El Segundo Drive, according to the state Department of Health Service.

"I know Arden-Cordova will be looking at those wells to see whether they need to be removed from service," said Charles Berrey, who oversees the Rancho Cordova groundwater cleanup for the EPA.

Utility officials could not be reached for comment.

If an "action level" is steadily exceeded, a public water system must notify its customers about the contaminant's presence and potential harm, state health officials said.

Utilities generally strive to keep contaminants below action levels to avoid the notification requirement and the ensuing alarm, said Lisa Fasano of the EPA's office in San Francisco.

"Some water suppliers are shutting down wells. Others are blending in water from other sources to bring down the perchlorate levels so they don't have to go out with that notification," Fasano said.