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Press Release

Groups to Challenge Feds' Refusal to Limit Perchlorate in Drinking Water

Rocket fuel ingredient has tainted drinking water in 26 states, pregnant women and newborns at greatest risk

October 3, 2008

Oakland, CA -- Environmental advocates plan to sue the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) over its refusal to set limits for perchlorate in drinking water. Perchlorate, a primary ingredient in rocket fuel, munitions, and explosives, has been linked to thyroid problems in pregnant women, newborns and young children nationwide.

The EPA formally [announced today](#) that it will not issue a drinking water standard for the chemical, which has contaminated drinking water in at least 26 states. EPA's decision represents a victory for the Department of Defense and military contractors, which for years have pressured EPA not to regulate perchlorate and other chemicals associated with weapons manufacturing.

Responding to the announcement, the nonprofit environmental law firm Earthjustice said it plans to challenge any final EPA decision in court, representing the Environmental Working Group and other



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organizations concerned about the health effects of perchlorate in drinking water.

"EPA's decision has industry's fingerprints all over it. Weapons makers will benefit at the expense of millions of Americans' drinking water spiked with rocket fuel," said Earthjustice attorney George Torgun. "Clean, safe drinking water is essential. That's why we will fight in court to make sure this toxin is regulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act."

For years, perchlorate was dumped in the ground by the military and missile-makers. The highly soluble toxin has spread from bases and factories to wells and rivers across the country. If limits for perchlorate in drinking water were set, the Defense Department and defense contractors could be found responsible for cleanups triggered by violations of the Safe Drinking Water Act.

Senator Barbara Boxer and Representative Hilda Solis (both D-CA) have pushed for legislation that would force EPA to set a federal perchlorate standard.

Perchlorate concentrations of less than 5 parts per billion have been shown to inhibit iodine uptake by the thyroid gland, resulting in a decreased formation of two hormones necessary for proper oxygen consumption and metabolism. The harm is greatest in populations that are developing and growing rapidly, such as fetuses, infants, and young children.

"According to EPA, at least 10 million people have rocket fuel in their drinking water. Yet today, the agency says there is not a 'meaningful opportunity for health risk reduction.' I'm sure the 10 million people drinking contaminated water think cleaning up their water supply would be 'meaningful,'" said Ben Dunham, Earthjustice environmental health policy analyst.



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When it comes to chemicals associated with weapons manufacturing, EPA's decision not to regulate perchlorate in drinking water appears to be the rule rather than the exception. A [2004 GAO report](#) found that of the more than 200 chemical contaminants associated with munitions use, most remain unregulated under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

"Because perchlorate contamination is often concentrated around military facilities, EPA's failure to protect the public from polluted drinking water will hit military families especially hard," Dunham added. "These families have already sacrificed so much for this country. This decision adds insult to injury, by allowing contamination to continue."

A 2005 GAO report with a state-by-state list of drinking water supplies contaminated by perchlorate can be found at: <http://www.gao.gov/new.items/d05462.pdf> (see Appendix II)



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