

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment



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OEHHA Adopts Updated Public Health Goal for Perchlorate

Updated goal provides California's children with the same level of protection previous goal provided to adults

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

SACRAMENTO – The Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) today published an updated public health goal (PHG) of 1 part per billion (ppb) for perchlorate in drinking water.

The new goal updates the previous PHG for perchlorate, which was set at 6 ppb in 2004. The updated PHG is lower than the previous goal because it incorporates new research about the effects of perchlorate on infants. Like the previous PHG, the updated PHG takes into account exposure from all sources of perchlorate including food. The lowering of the PHG does not suggest any food is unsafe or that the public should change its dietary habits.

“This updated public health goal reflects infants’ increased susceptibility to the health effects of perchlorate,” said OEHHA Director Dr. George Alexeeff. “It is set at a level that would provide health protection for people of all ages.”

A public health goal is not an enforceable regulatory standard. Its purpose is to provide scientific guidance to the State Water Resources Control Board’s Division of Drinking Water in reviewing the existing state drinking water standard for perchlorate. There is no current federal standard for perchlorate in drinking water. The current state standard, officially known as a maximum contaminant level (MCL), is set at 6 ppb.

Perchlorate is a chemical that can occur naturally in the environment and also may be released by fireworks, improper handling or disposal of rocket fuel, and various industrial processes. Perchlorate is known to block the thyroid’s ability to take in and process iodide, which is a nutrient essential to brain development, growth, heart function, and other systems.

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Studies conducted by OEHHA scientists and others have revealed that perchlorate can harm the health of infants at lower levels than the levels that are harmful to healthy adults.

OEHHA's updated PHG incorporates new data on how much water infants consume per kilogram of body weight. It also considers infants' intake of perchlorate from infant formula reconstituted with tap water.

Today's action finalizes the updated PHG for perchlorate that was released for public comment and peer review in 2011.

Public health goals are set solely on the basis of health protection and are not a line between a "safe" level and a "dangerous" level of a contaminant. State law requires that each regulatory drinking water standard must be set as close to the corresponding PHG as is economically and technologically feasible.

The State Water Resources Control Board will now use the PHG to inform its review of the current enforceable regulatory standard for the chemical.

A copy of the perchlorate PHG document can be viewed or downloaded from OEHHA's web site at www.oehha.ca.gov.

OEHHA is the primary state entity for the assessment of risks posed by chemical contaminants in the environment. Its mission is to protect and enhance public health and the environment by scientific evaluation of risks posed by hazardous substances.

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