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California to Set Drinking Water Level for Dangerous Chemical Hex Chrome

Erin Brockovich, public health and environmental advocates urge State EPA to set safe standard to protect Californians

SAN FRANCISCO, CA (Oct 18, 2009) – Hexavalent chromium (hex chrome), the notorious cancer-causing chemical made famous in the film Erin Brockovich, contaminates drinking water in over 500 California communities, according to environmental and public health experts. The California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA) held a hearing today to take public comment on a proposed level for hex chrome in drinking water.

Although the state was required to set an enforceable standard by 2004, it is now five years past that deadline. In August, the Cal/EPA EPA's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) released a draft "Public Health Goal" for hex chrome in drinking water that needs to be finalized after today's hearing so that an enforceable drinking water standard can be set to protect the millions of Californians living with contaminated water.

Despite the serious health impacts of hex chrome, there is no federal drinking water standard for it. When finalized, California will be the first state in the nation to set a drinking water standard for this dangerous substance once again leading the nation in protecting the public from a dangerous chemical.

Following are statements by California environmental and public health advocates:

Erin Brockovich:

“Hex chrome is a serious problem and one that I’m glad to see being addressed. California has always led the way in setting standards that other states indeed follow. We need to create more awareness and make prevention the goal to protect people. Hex chrome is a widespread problem and not just limited to California nor to the community of Hinkley, as featured in the film, but communities all over the country have been poisoned by hex chrome.”

Senator Deborah Ortiz, author of the bill to establish a drinking water standard for hex chrome:

“I passed the law to set a safe drinking water standard for hex chrome by 2004. Five years later, Californians continue to be exposed to unsafe levels of hex chrome in drinking water. Communities across California have the right to a safe public health goal and we ask the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment to honor that law.”

Gina Solomon, MD, MPH, Senior Scientist at the Natural Resources Defense Council:

“Hex chrome has been clearly shown to cause cancer, as well as other serious health effects including liver and kidney damage and harm to the reproductive system and developing fetus. Cal/EPA must finalize public health goal for chromium in drinking water quickly in order to protect Californians from this dangerous substance.”

Virginia Madueno, Clean Water Action organizer and member of an impacted community in Riverbank, CA:

“As a community water advocate and a mother living in an impacted neighborhood, I live everyday with the uncertainty of what the chromium in my tap water is doing to my family and my neighbors. Any delay in finalizing this public health goal will continue to compromise the health and safety of my children, and that is simply unacceptable.”

Renee Sharp, Director of the Environmental Working Group’s California office:

“The bad news is that 30 million Californians in more than 500 communities around the state are being exposed to a potent carcinogen through their drinking water. The good news is that attempted industry corruption of the process did not prevail and the state is finally one step closer to addressing this serious public health concern.”

Zoe Kelman, Director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility, PEER:

“In 2001, California’s efforts to protect public health from hex chrome were hijacked by industry but OEHHA scientists were persistent. Thanks to them, we have an impeccable study that provides the country with the basis for regulating chromium in drinking water to protect the health of children, workers and the public at large.”

Read blog by Gina Solomon, NRDC Senior Scientist: [The Legacy of Erin Brockovich: Chromium Contamination in Drinking Water](#)

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The Natural Resources Defense Council is a national, nonprofit organization of scientists, lawyers and environmental specialists dedicated to protecting public health and the environment. Founded in 1970, NRDC has 1.2 million members and online activists, served from offices in New York, Washington, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco and Beijing. Visit <http://www.nrdc.org>.