

Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment



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OEHHA Adopts First-in-the-Nation Public Health Goal For Hexavalent Chromium in Drinking Water

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SACRAMENTO – The California Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) today published the nation's first public health goal (PHG) for hexavalent chromium in drinking water.

The final PHG for hexavalent chromium, also known as chromium 6, is set at 0.02 parts per billion (ppb), which is the same level as the draft that was released for public comment in December 2010.

"This final public health goal is the culmination of years of study and research on the health effects of this chemical," said Dr. George Alexeeff, OEHHA's Acting Director. "As the nation's first official goal for this contaminant, it will be an important tool that the Department of Public Health will use to develop a regulatory standard that will protect Californians from the health risks of chromium 6 in drinking water."

"Adoption of the PHG is an important step in the process of ensuring high-quality drinking water for Californians," said Dr. Alexeeff. "The PHG reflects the most recent and definitive scientific research and demonstrates OEHHA's commitment to fully assessing the health risks of hexavalent chromium."

A PHG is the level of a contaminant in drinking water that does not pose a significant health risk. It is not a regulatory level for cleanup of groundwater or surface water contamination.

The public health goal for chromium 6 is not a maximum "safe" level for exposure to the chemical. Rather, it serves as an assessment of the health risk posed by drinking water that contains chromium 6, based on an estimated "one in one million" lifetime cancer risk level. For every million people who drink tap water with that level of chromium 6 each day for 70 years, there is likely to be one additional case of cancer from exposure to the chemical.

State law requires OEHHA to set PHGs to provide scientific guidance to the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) in developing enforceable drinking water standards. By law, CDPH must set the eventual standard as close to the PHG as economically and technically feasible.

California Environmental Protection Agency

The energy challenge facing California is real. Every Californian needs to take immediate action to reduce energy consumption.

The PHG for chromium 6 reflects new research documenting that young children and other sensitive subpopulations are more susceptible than the general population to health risks from exposure to carcinogens. It is based on a study published by the National Toxicology Program in 2007 in which laboratory rats and mice were given drinking water containing high levels of chromium 6. Some of the laboratory animals developed gastrointestinal tumors. OEHHA, CDPH and other organizations requested the research to provide data needed to develop a chromium 6 PHG and drinking water standard.

Chromium 6 occurs naturally in some drinking water. The metal is also used in a number of industrial applications and has entered some water supplies as a result of past waste-disposal practices.

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.

OEHHA, which is part of the California Environmental Protection Agency, issued original and revised draft versions of the PHG for public comment in August 2009 and December 2010, respectively. The University of California also oversaw two separate external scientific peer reviews of the PHG. The final PHG document includes responses to both the peer reviewers' comments and to the extensive number of comments received from the public.

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