

DOD, Defense Contractors Lobby to Block Perchlorate Advisory

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The Pentagon and the defense industry is lobbying the White House to prevent U.S. EPA from tightening a health advisory for a rocket-fuel chemical

Representatives of the Defense Department, the Navy and aerospace and defense companies have met with the Office of Management and Budget this month to discuss a pending EPA decision on the chemical, perchlorate.

In a document presented to OMB, the groups argue that rushing a decision will have "adverse public health consequences and unintended negative effects on all drinking water regulatory programs, and on voluntary, state and federal cleanup efforts."

Perchlorate contamination of drinking water, which is linked to DOD and contractor activities at rocket test sites, has been documented in at least 35 states and the District of Columbia. The chemical can inhibit the thyroid gland's iodine uptake, interfering with fetal development.

EPA said in January it would not decide on regulating perchlorate in drinking water until after the National Academy of Sciences evaluates the federal health advisory level of 15 parts per billion -- a guideline for state and local regulators. EPA also wants the science panel to address modeling to determine the chemical's effects on infants and young children and the implications of recent biomonitoring studies.

Last year, the Bush administration's EPA said it would not limit perchlorate in water, saying there is no "meaningful opportunity for health risk reduction" through a regulation of national drinking water.

But critics slammed the decision. EPA's inspector general found in January the agency violated its own guidelines regarding perchlorate because it did not consider the cumulative effects of perchlorate and other environmental toxins ([Greenwire](#), Jan. 5).

None of the defense groups could be reached for comment, but they submitted documents suggesting their concerns about press reports of the chemical in milk, fruits

and vegetables. "Media-generated 'health scares' based on misconceptions of new studies or unclear understanding of regulatory objectives usually create a false perception of risk and lead to worse dietary choices," they wrote.

EPA's recent proposal to change its risk-assessment process by reversing some Bush-era changes to the Integrated Risk Information System, or IRIS -- a key chemical database - - could also be prompting industry concerns, said Jeff Ruch, executive director of Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility.

EPA will now manage the chemical-assessment process itself; previous interagency consultations on risk were managed by OMB and other agencies, including the Pentagon, and could participate in the risk assessment process earlier.

"The defense industry is the 500-pound pollution gorilla," Ruch said. "Perchlorate is at the top of their concerns because it's become probably the biggest clean water challenge facing the country."