

Massachusetts Proposes Strict Perchlorate Drinking Water and Cleanup Standard

On March 14, 2006, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MADEP) announced that it is proposing to set the state maximum contaminant level for perchlorate in drinking water at 2.0 ppb, and to set the soil and groundwater cleanup standard for perchlorate at 2.0 ppb. These standards would be the lowest regulatory standards in the nation for perchlorate.

MADEP is proposing these stringent standards because current scientific information suggests that there may be a link between human exposure to perchlorate and interference with the uptake of iodine by the thyroid gland, potentially interfering with proper development of the fetus and young children, as well as the metabolism of adults.

In Massachusetts, perchlorate was first identified in 2000 at the Massachusetts Military Reservation on Cape Cod, apparently resulting from military explosives. In 2004, MADEP required public water suppliers to conduct extensive testing for perchlorate, which established that perchlorate had contaminated nine public drinking water supplies located across the state. MADEP identified the likely source of the contamination as blasting in three cases, and as fireworks displays in three other cases.

Perchlorate contamination is not limited to Massachusetts. Perchlorate contamination has been identified in at least 35 states, including all regions of the United States. A May 2005 report by the Government Accountability Office identifies 395 sites nationwide that are contaminated with 4 parts per billion (ppb) or more perchlorate. The United States Environmental Protection Agency estimates that the drinking water supplied to 11 million Americans contains some detectable perchlorate contamination. For example, Lake Mead and the Colorado River, which supply drinking and irrigation water to parts of California, Nevada and Arizona, are contaminated with perchlorate. Additionally, the California Department of Health Services reports that, as of August 2, 2005, 394 drinking water sources in California have detectable levels of perchlorate.

MADEP is accepting comment on its proposed standards through May 12, 2006.

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