

A New Disinfectant in Our Water Supply

In February 2004 the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC) began adding chloramine to all water in the Hetch Hetchy Water System instead of chlorine. Chloramine is a combination of chlorine plus ammonia. This was done in response to a Federal Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) mandate that all water systems must lower the levels of trihalomethanes (THMs) in their drinking water supply. THMs, which are possible carcinogens, are a by-product formed when chlorine combines with organic matter in the water. Although there are other choices available, the decision to use chloramine was made without public input. The SFPUC has turned a deaf ear to citizen complaints.

Citizens Concerned About Chloramines (CCAC) is a grassroots organization that was formed when people began having serious, adverse reactions to chloramine. Skin symptoms can include burning, dry, itching, or blistering skin. Respiratory symptoms include sore throat, coughing, wheezing, sneezing, severe asthma, and allergy-like nasal and sinus congestion. Digestive symptoms include irritation of the esophagus and digestive tract, which mimic acid reflux disease and irritable bowel syndrome. People with suppressed immune systems are at greater risk because chloramine is much less effective at killing disease causing organisms than chlorine.

According to water filtration engineers, no ordinary household water filter will remove chloramine, especially for bathing and showering purposes. The major route of exposure to chloramine is through showering and bathing. Filtration for these purposes is extremely difficult and expensive.

Our research has found that chloramine can dissolve the lead out of water pipe joint solder and can cause pinhole leaks in the copper pipe itself. It will destroy rubber parts in toilets and hot water heaters as well as de-elasticize polymer water pipes causing these carcinogens to be mixed into your drinking water. The polymer pipes then become brittle and break, releasing chloraminated water into the environment.

Research from the Canadian EPA has shown that small amounts of chloramine such as released by a water main or fire hydrant break will kill fish, frogs and other aquatic life in nearby streams. The East Bay Municipal Utility District (EBMUD) has already experienced the broken pipes and dead fish and frogs.

CCAC's research has shown that there have been no adequate human health studies done on chloramine. This was confirmed by the North Coast County Water District (NCCWD) and also by the Bay Area Water Supply and Conservation Agency (BAWSCA). CCAC is asking our lawmakers to remove chloramine from the water until adequate human health studies can be done.

California State Assemblymember Ira Ruskin, an influential voice on water issues, has included chloramine in the legislation he wants to bring up in Sacramento this year, 2006. We need you to contact him ASAP to let him know that the chloramine issue must be a priority. Please send him a brief message imploring him to remove the chloramine from the water supply to protect our health, the environment, and the infrastructure. Please include any symptoms you have that are related to the water, any plumbing damage you have experienced, or your concerns for the environment. Please limit your message to a paragraph or two.

Assemblymember Ruskin's e-mail address: assemblymember.Ruskin@assembly.ca.gov
Mailing address: State Capitol, P.O. Box 942849, Sacramento, CA, 94249-0001.
Phone number: (650) 691-2121.

For more information on the chloramine issue or to answer any questions you may have, call CCAC President, Denise Johnson-Kula at (650) 328-0424. You may also e-mail CCAC Vice President Linda Corwin at lindacor@earthlink.net. Please CC your message to Assemblymember Ruskin to Linda Corwin.