# State proposes level for perchlorate

WATER: Inland providers say they already meet the suggested standard of 6 parts per billion.

**10:00 PM PDT on Monday, August 28, 2006**

**By JENNIFER BOWLES and MICHAEL FISHER**
**The Press-Enterprise**

A state-proposed limit on perchlorate contamination in drinking water disappointed environmentalists who sought a more restrictive standard for the rocket-fuel chemical considered the Inland region's most pressing water-pollution problem.

Announced Monday by the California Department of Health Services, the long-awaited proposal would set a standard for perchlorate contamination at 6 parts per billion, or triple the level recently adopted in Massachusetts.

High perchlorate levels have forced some Inland water agencies to close wells, dilute tainted water with clean water or undergo a costly treatment process to remove the chemical. Many local water officials said they already meet or exceed the proposed standard through treatment and will continue to do so.

The proposal could become final after a public-comment period ends Nov. 3. If it is adopted, California water districts would be required to ensure that any perchlorate in the water they supply to their customers does not exceed 6 parts per billion.

Department of Health Services officials were not available for comment late Monday. A spokeswoman said by e-mail that the agency considered the availability of water-treatment technologies and the cost to water districts in setting the proposed standard.

Perchlorate, also used in road flares, fireworks and similar products, has been detected in water supplies used in Corona, Redlands, Riverside and other Inland communities. The chemical has been found to interfere with the thyroid gland's ability to make hormones that guide brain and nerve development in fetuses, babies and young children.

Environmentalists said they are disappointed that the state -- usually a leader, setting some of the nation's highest environmental standards -- didn't follow the lead of Massachusetts, which recently adopted a standard of 2 parts per billion.

"I think it's a travesty; it's a shame," said Davin Diaz of the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice in San Bernardino. The nonprofit group has been the Inland region's largest voice for pushing for perchlorate cleanup in the San Bernardino Valley and in the Glen Avon area.

Diaz said he worried the new standard would allow cities affected by a large perchlorate plume in ground water beneath Rialto, Colton and Fontana to stop treating wells affected by the rocket-fuel ingredient.

But Eric Fraser, Colton's water and wastewater director, said that won't happen. The levels of perchlorate that taint three of the city's wells reach as high as 10 parts per billion. Well-head treatment brings that number down so perchlorate is no longer detected, and that process will stay in place, he said.

"That's not the choice we've made as a city," Fraser said of loosening its water-delivery standards. He said pregnant women and young children who are at risk for contamination aren't fully considered in developing a standard.

"It's just as easy with the systems we have on line to treat to nondetect, and that will continue," said Fraser, whose district serves about 50,000 people.

Anthony "Butch" Araiza, general manager of the West Valley Water District in Rialto, said the district already treats water from five perchlorate-tainted wells, and it has closed one well where the chemical topped 600-parts per billion.

"We'll continue to treat at the levels we do," said Araiza, who added the district had raised so many concerns it would be hard to step back.

His district provides water for 60,000 people in Rialto, Bloomington and parts of Fontana and Colton.

Araiza's agency has been hard-hit by the perchlorate plume under Rialto. Levels as high as 10,000 parts per billion have been detected in the ground water beneath the suspected source, an industrial site in northern Rialto used by fireworks manufacturers and defense contractors.

That discovery has raised concerns that more perchlorate is flowing toward drinking wells.

Water agencies in Riverside County that depend on supplies from the Colorado River, long tainted by perchlorate from a Nevada manufacturing plant, are in better shape than they once were thanks to an ongoing cleanup, said Bob Muir, a Metropolitan Water District spokesman.

The river had levels of 9 parts per billion in the late 1990s, but they now hover around 2 parts per billion, Muir said.

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