

State's perchlorate plan too strict, Pentagon says

By **AMANDA LEHMERT**
STAFF WRITER

BOSTON - Pentagon officials objected to the state's proposed drinking water safety standard for the chemical perchlorate yesterday, saying it offers an unwarranted extra level of safety

A letter from Navy environmental program manager Andrew Stackpole was received by state environmental regulators on the last day of a month-long comment period on the proposed 2 parts per billion drinking water and hazardous waste cleanup standards. The Defense Department supports a 24.5 parts per billion standard.

Stackpole also argued that the state should justify its assumption that only 20 percent of perchlorate ingestion will come from water, rather than a higher percentage.

State officials will respond to questions from the Defense Department and others in the coming weeks as they continue the process of turning the plan into law.

Four years ago the state began the process of setting standards for perchlorate - found in rocket fuel, explosives and fireworks - after it was found flowing under the Massachusetts Military Reservation in the Cape's sole-source aquifer, the region's principal source of drinking water. The base has approximately eight groundwater plumes of perchlorate flowing under the base. The concentration of perchlorate in the plumes ranges from trace amounts to 700 parts per billion. One part per billion is roughly equivalent to a drop of water in a 700,000-gallon, Olympic-sized swimming pool.

At certain levels, perchlorate will disrupt the function of the thyroid gland, which regulates the body in adults and development in children.

If state officials establish the proposed standards as law, it will be the first place in the nation to do so.

The Defense Department, a major perchlorate consumer, and defense contractors have challenged similar standards at the federal level and in other states.

Because of Defense Department opposition, the National Academies of Sciences stepped in and suggested a safe dose for perchlorate last January. The independent panel's suggestion was later used by the Environmental Protection Agency to suggest an interim guidance of 24.5 parts per billion for its Superfund cleanup programs, like the one at the Upper Cape base.

When a safety standard becomes legal, polluters must clean up areas to meet that standard. The stricter the standard, the more expensive the cleanup.

State environmental officials reviewed the National Academies of Sciences recommendations, but ultimately decided that a smaller dosage would be safest for "sensitive populations" such as

children.

The National Academies' recommendation, according to Stackpole's letter, already accounted for those sensitive populations so an additional safety factor leading to a stricter standard was not necessary.

The Defense Department also asked the state in the letter to substantiate why it decided that people drinking perchlorate in water would only account for 20 percent of their total perchlorate consumption.

That 20 percent consumption assumption is a standard value used by both the state and the federal government when setting drinking water standards.

In the case of perchlorate, state drinking water officials cited the unfolding research about perchlorate in U.S. food supplies as evidence that it is appropriate to assume people will eat perchlorate as well as drink it.

Amanda Lehmert can be reached

at alehmert@capecodonline.com.

(Published: May 13, 2006)

Copyright © Cape Cod Times. All rights reserved.