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## EDITORIAL

By Bill Swichtenberg



# Consider the Source

A report released by the Environmental Working Group (EWG) and U.S. Public Interest Research Group (U.S. PIRG) has taken aim at chlorination byproducts (CBPs) in tap water. The group's assessment states that more than 100,000 women are at elevated risk of miscarriage or birth defects because of CBPs in tap water.

The report, "Consider the Source," seems to blame EPA and Congress for failing to clean up rivers and reservoirs and therefore, forcing water utilities to chlorinate water. "Until Congress and the EPA act to limit pollution from farms and urban runoff so that water entering drinking water treatment plants is much cleaner than it is today, CBPs will remain at unacceptably high levels," stated the report.

The report estimates that from 1996 through 2001, more than 16 million people in 1,258 communities were served water contaminated with CBPs for at least 12 months at levels higher than a new legal limit the went into effect January 1. The highest levels of CBPs were reported by small rural drinking water utilities.

Many water groups were quick to respond to the study. The USEPA stated that current disinfection byproduct (DBP) standards "provide the safest balance between the need to disinfect drinking water while providing a healthy margin of safety to all, including our most vulnerable citizens."

The New Jersey Section of the American Water Works Association (NJAWWA) stated that it recognized the need to clean up source waters and "are working to meet not only the new disinfection byproduct rules but also the new standards on the horizon."

C.T. Howlett, Jr., executive director of the Chlorine Chemistry Council, added

that for more than 100 years, chlorine has been added to drinking water to destroy disease-causing bacteria and viruses. As a result, waterborne diseases have essentially been eliminated in the U.S. They also cited the World Health Organization's findings that "risks to health from DBPs are extremely small in comparison with inadequate disinfection."

The report does not offer solutions. It does call for the immediate clean up of lakes and rivers that provide tap water by reducing the soil erosion and the nutrient and animal waste runoff from farms that increase the need for chlorination. According to the report, the Farm Bill currently being debated in Congress is an opportunity to fund farmland conservation programs that could protect waterways, curb sprawl and clean up America's tap water.

EWG and U.S. PIRG also recommended the creation of a nationwide health-tracking network, coordinated by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Citing the lack of reliable data on environmentally caused disease, the network would monitor American's exposure to pollution and would track birth defects, miscarriages and other diseases linked to pollution.

However, all parties agree with the need for cleaner source water to help prevent the precursors that contribute to the formation of disinfection byproducts. "We all need to work in a cooperative spirit between dischargers, regulators and environmentalists in a concerted effort to clean up our waterways and reduce disinfection byproduct precursors," stated the NJAWWA.

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