



EPA to okay rocket fuel in drinking water?

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On the list of noxious chemicals you'd rather not find in your drinking water, **perchlorate** ranks pretty high. The chemical - found primarily in rocket fuel, but also used in fireworks and some fertilizers - attacks the thyroid gland, reducing its ability to absorb iodine from the bloodstream. In adults, that can affect the body's ability to regulate its metabolism; in children - and, most troublingly, in unborn fetuses - it can cause serious developmental problems, including deafness, reduced IQ, and motor problems.

You'd think that federal regulators would be pulling out all the stops to keep perchlorate out of our water supplies - right? Er, wrong: There are currently no federal restrictions on the amount of perchlorate in our drinking water, despite studies that have found the chemical in drinking water in 35 states, affecting a minimum of 11 million people. And what gets into the water also **gets into the food-chain**: Worrying levels of perchlorate have been found in everything from lettuce to cow's milk, and a 2005 study found that "virtually all" human breast milk is now contaminated to some degree.

Having failed to safeguard our water supplies, the EPA is now **dragging its heels** over providing a solution. Benjamin Grumbles, the agency's top water-safety official, told Congress this week that the EPA might not decide whether to begin regulating perchlorate until the end of the year - and that even then there was "a distinct possibility" that the agency would stick to its guns and refuse to limit the amount of perchlorate in America's drinking water.

The EPA says it needs to give its scientists more time to figure out whether perchlorate is actually harmful, and at what levels. That sounds reasonable - but given the agency's usual disregard for scientific opinion, some greens believe that other factors may be at work behind the scenes. Prime suspect: the Pentagon, which has been lobbying against a federal perchlorate standard for years, hoping to avoid an expensive cleanup of its military and aerospace facilities.

In any case, the EPA's claims that we don't know enough to regulate perchlorate ring hollow: State regulators in places like California and Massachusetts have been limiting perchlorate levels for years without a problem. Now Sen. Barbara Boxer is working to pass laws requiring perchlorate testing and strict federal limits; hopefully, that will be enough to finally put a rocket under the EPA.

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