

UPDATE 1/14/11

NORMAN'S WATER QUALITY

The City of Norman, as well as many media outlets, has received excerpts from the recent report from the Environmental Working Group (EWG) concerning reported levels of hexavalent chromium in our water supply. Norman has reviewed the EWG report; however the report does not provide specific data regarding the water sample collected in Norman. Norman staff requested specific information regarding the sampling event in our letter to EWG on December 22, 2010. At this time, EWG has not yet responded to the letter or electronic mail.

You may rest assured that the City of Norman is committed to providing water that is safe to drink for all members of our community and protective of public health. The City Manager and Mayor has appointed a Chromium 6 working group that will be constituted of senior management and three members of Council. There will also be representatives on a technical advisory committee who bring expertise in chemistry and geology, public health, and water systems to work with this group as we continue to monitor the situation.

In Norman, total chromium is tested periodically in accordance with requirements of the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Total chromium is regulated by the EPA as a primary drinking water contaminant with a maximum contaminant level (MCL) of 100 ug/l (parts per billion or ppb) and includes Chromium VI, Chromium III and the other states of elemental chromium. This level of protection was set by the EPA in 1992 based on the best available science to prevent potential health problems. Since 1992, the EPA mandated MCL of 100 ppb for total chromium was reviewed twice and the EPA found no public health concerns that might cause the MCL to be changed.

On December 21, 2010, the EPA issued the following in response to the EWG Report.

“EPA absolutely has a drinking water standard for total chromium, which includes chromium-6 (also known as Hexavalent Chromium), and we require water systems to test for it. This standard is based on the best available science and is enforceable by law. Ensuring safe drinking water for all Americans is a top priority for EPA. The agency regularly re-evaluates drinking water standards and, based on new science on chromium-6, had already begun a rigorous and comprehensive review of its health effects. In September, we released a draft of that scientific review for public comment. When this human health assessment is finalized in 2011, EPA will carefully review the conclusions and consider all relevant information, including the Environmental Working Group’s study, to determine if a new standard needs to be set.”

Norman has monitored total chromium for several years and complies with the existing EPA maximum contaminant level of 100 ppb. Chromium testing is reported annually to our customers in our Consumer Confidence Report (CCR);

the latest CCR indicates total chromium values for our ground water wells are between 11 and 86 ppb, all of which are well below the MCL of 100 ppb. Seven new water wells have been tested for total chromium since issuance of the CCR and their levels range from “non-detect” to 80 ppb; “non-detect” means the level present in the water was less than the detectible limit of 10 ppb for total chromium. The Water Treatment Plant, that treats Lake Thunderbird water, also has total chromium levels below the detectible limit of 10 ppb. The following link provides a copy of the CCR:

<http://www.normanok.gov/sites/default/files/WebFM/Norman/Utilities/Consumer%20Confidence%20Report%202010.pdf>

On January 12, 2011, EPA issued guidance to water suppliers regarding how they might sample and test for chromium 6. EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson stated, “This action is another step forward in understanding the problem and working towards a solution that is based on the best available science and law.” The press release noted that EPA’s latest data show that no public water systems are in violation of the current standard. This means the current chromium-6 standard has been as protective and precautionary as the science of that time allowed. However, the science behind chromium-6 is evolving. The EPA regularly re-evaluates drinking water standards and, based on new science on chromium-6, has already begun a rigorous and comprehensive review of its health effects. When the human health assessment is finalized in 2011, EPA will review the conclusions and consider all relevant information to determine if a new standard needs to be set. While EPA conducts this important evaluation, the agency believes more information is needed on the presence of chromium-6 in drinking water. For that reason, EPA is providing guidance to all public water systems and encouraging them to consider how they may enhance their monitoring for chromium-6.

Using EPA’s suggested recommendations, the City of Norman water treatment plant division has ordered additional testing equipment that would allow for testing specifically for chromium-6. The equipment has been ordered and testing should begin with in the next few weeks. Water testing points will be set up for each water well as well as testing the water before and after the water treatment plant. Additional testing points will be tested through out the water distribution system. Norman’s water system is 100% in compliance with all current EPA’s regulations. The additional tests will provide further information about the aquifer, the wells and water quality as the water travels through the distribution system. With this additional information, Norman will be in a better position to react if new regulations are promulgated.

The entire press release may be found at the following link:

<http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/d0cf6618525a9efb85257359003fb69d/93a75b03149d30b08525781500600f62!OpenDocument> .

The new EPA guidance provided to drinking water systems can be found at the following link:

<http://water.epa.gov/drink/info/chromium/guidance.cfm>

There are no current federal or State of Oklahoma regulations governing hexavalent chromium, which is also known as chromium VI or chromium-6. Chromium-6 is one of several oxidation states of the chromium atom. Another form, trivalent chromium, chromium-3 or chromium III, occurs naturally in many vegetables, fruits, meats, and grains. It is a nutritionally essential element for human health and is often added to vitamins as a dietary supplement. Chromium-3 is needed for normal glucose, protein and fat metabolism. Some scientific studies have shown that chromium-6 may be converted to chromium-3 by the human body.

It is important to understand that the maximum contaminant level set by the EPA is based on chronic, or lifetime daily consumption, of 2 liters of water containing 100 ppb chromium 6. In other words, as reported by the EPA, the MCL was set assuming daily exposure of the human population (including sensitive subgroups) to this level of chromium 6 without an appreciable risk of deleterious health effects during a lifetime. One time or any other short-term exposures would have negligible potential for health effects.

Norman pays close attention to new research related to drinking water contaminants. As you may remember in 2006, Norman addressed a similar issue regarding a federally mandated reduction of the MCL for arsenic from 50 ppb to 10 ppb. Norman performed major modifications to its ground water supply and Norman remains in compliance with the new arsenic rule.

As noted above, the EPA is currently evaluating new health effects data on chromium-6. That evaluation is expected to be complete in late 2011, and we are prepared to respond in a way that protects public health and meets federal and State of Oklahoma standards. Norman will continue to work closely with the ODEQ and the EPA to assure our drinking water is safe for human consumption. Norman continues to support research by the EPA, the Water Research Foundation (WRF), and other government and scientific organizations.

The following EPA link provides typical questions and answers regarding chromium in drinking water.

<http://water.epa.gov/drink/contaminants/basicinformation/chromium.cfm>

The ODEQ Public Water Supply Compliance Tracking Section may be contacted regarding Norman's historic drinking water compliance record. Their phone number is (405) 702-8100.

The American Water Works Association (AWWA) is renowned for their expertise regarding safe drinking water and they have offered to answer any additional questions citizens might have. We encourage you to contact their organization should you feel the need for a third-party perspective.

The AWWA Public Affairs contact number is (303) 734-3410.

The AWWA Governmental Affairs contact number is (703) 915-4385.

The AWWA website located at the following link:

<http://www.awwa.org/>

Again, we share your concerns and will update our website as we gather new information.

Sincerely,

City of Norman Utilities