



## Group hits perchlorate study tactics

Misleading data alleged

By Fred Ortega Staff Writer

December 3, 2006

An environmental organization claims that a group funded by manufacturing and aerospace companies - including one found liable for contaminating the San Gabriel Valley Water Basin - used misleading research and tobacco industry-style lobbying to influence the debate on the effects of perchlorate.

In a report released last week, Los Angeles-based Environment California says that more than half of all studies on the health effects of perchlorate published between 1995 and 2005 were funded by the Perchlorate Study Group. During that same period, the National Institutes of Health funded only 10 percent of the research.

The Perchlorate Study Group was founded in response to efforts to regulate the potentially dangerous chemical in drinking water. It was bankrolled by companies including Kerr McGee Chemical Corp., Lockheed Martin and Aerojet-General Corp.

Aerojet has already paid millions to help build a groundwater treatment plant in Baldwin Park to help remove pollutants introduced into the water table at its former plant in Azusa. The company has also been sued in federal court to clean up pollution allegedly leaked from its old facilities in South El Monte.

Medical studies on human exposure to perchlorate, a primary ingredient in rocket fuel, have suggested it has an adverse effect on thyroid function and that high doses could be particularly dangerous to pregnant women and their unborn children.

The report quotes internal Aerojet documents suggesting that the Perchlorate Study Group was formed to give the federal government a "scientific based argument" to justify a higher "safe dose" in drinking water. That would reduce the amount of the chemical the company would be forced to clean up at its sites.

The Perchlorate Study Group has lobbied for maximum contaminant levels of 200 parts per billion (ppb) in drinking water, much higher than the 24.5 ppb threshold favored by the Environmental Protection Agency and the 6 ppb limit being considered by the state of California.

One part per billion is equivalent to about a half-teaspoon in an Olympic-size swimming pool.

The report also accused the study group of hiring the public relations firm APCO - the same company hired by Phillip Morris to fight anti-tobacco regulations - to help undermine the case for thorough perchlorate cleanup.

Officials for Aerojet did not return multiple calls seeking comment for this story.

The Environment California report criticized the Perchlorate Study Group's use of so-called ecological studies in nearly half of the studies it sponsored. Ecological studies look for direct evidence of adverse health effects in

communities with perchlorate contamination.

"It is a general principle of epidemiology that these types of studies have limitations and cannot prove that exposure to a chemical has no effect," wrote Sujatha Jahagirdar, one of the authors of the report.

While she acknowledged the usefulness of ecological studies, USC researcher Dr. Wendy Cozen said the method is a type of short cut used by many researchers.

"One of the problems is that when you are looking at a large area, how do you know the people in all those homes are actually drinking that water, or that they don't strictly rely on bottled water?" said Cozen, an associate professor at USC's Keck School of

Medicine and an epidemiologist with the university's Cancer Surveillance Program.

For a study with concrete proof, Cozen said a case-controlled study would be needed.

"That is where you actually go in and ask people who are sick or not sick, exposed or not exposed, to see if there is a connection between the disease," she said.

An official for the state agency tasked with recommending perchlorate limits in drinking water said that his office reviewed all studies available on perchlorate to reach its decision, including those funded by the Perchlorate Study Group.

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