

'Safe drinking water' law features unsafe anti-chlorine measure

by David Cherry and Marcia Merry Baker

In the Safe Drinking Water reauthorization legislation now before Congress, is a new, anti-chlorination measure, that, given the decrepit condition of much of the U.S. water supply systems, along with the increase in waterborne disease vectors, is a prescription for public health disaster. The Senate voted up the proposed legislation by 99-0 on Nov. 29, 1995. A House version of the bill is in the House Commerce Committee for work-up.

Don't they know any better? The answer to that question, we leave to other pages in our journal. Here, we concentrate on the lies about dangers from chlorination, and who is spreading the lies. We also provide documentation from local municipalities and water districts around the country, about the immediate dangers in banning chlorination water treatment.

The dirty truth about dirty water

The New York City-based Natural Resources Defense Council has been spearheading a drive to force the use of drinking water disinfection methods that are less effective than chlorine, under the guise of protecting the public from minuscule quantities of chlorine by-products formed in the water. The NRDC (a creation of the Ford Foundation, using Yale Law School whiz kids) is the hit squad that fabricated the Alar scare and was a leader in getting DDT banned.

Before looking at the chlorine scare lie, look first at the pedigree of the NRDC.

During the 1995 deliberation over reauthorization of the Safe Drinking Water Act, the NRDC conducted a nationwide "Clean Water Media Campaign," involving TV and multimedia spots on various topics, under the theme, "Let's make every drop count." Almost every propaganda point the NRDC makes on water—in particular, the chlorine scare—is scientifically unfounded.

The NRDC was created in the latter 1960s as part of a phalanx of foundation-funded "save-the-environment" agencies, backed by international financial and political interests centered mostly in London, and deployed for the purpose of demoralizing public opinion to accept "post-industrial" economic decline. Since the 1970s, these political networks—best identified with Britain's House of Windsor—

and financial and commodities cartels, have acted to make vast gains off speculation and control, while obstructing development and maintenance of vital infrastructure, and other economic measures in the national interest.

Allies of the NRDC include the World Wide Fund for Nature (formerly, the World Wildlife Fund), the Conservation Foundation, the Earth Project, etc. Among other similarities, the NRDC and these agencies all denounce large-scale infrastructure (dams, water treatment facilities) and advanced technology such as nuclear power and desalination, as detrimental to the environment.

The NRDC claims credit for the enactment in 1972 of the U.S. Clean Water Act, which stated the goal of eliminating pollution from U.S. rivers, lakes, and coasts. In fact, this law marks the point when the level of U.S. investment into upkeep and expansion of waterworks infrastructure—which is what would prevent pollution and provide safe water in needed volumes—started to fall below even minimum maintenance levels.

Decrepit U.S. water infrastructure

What did the Clean Water Act, and subsequent legislation do? They mandated goals, but mobilized no resources to achieve them. The Clean Water Act mandated sewage treatment, and the Environmental Protection Agency's Water Enforcement Division monitors compliance. There are additional federal mandates, such as the Ocean Dumping Ban Act, which also requires monitoring. But there has been no mobilization of funding for infrastructure. When pollution is found in a locality, it is put under court orders, by federal mandate, to clean up.

Therefore, as the economy declined, the infrastructure rotted out more and more each year. By the 1990s, water supply problems were worsening throughout all the 18 hydrologic regions of the United States. Nationwide, there are about 59,000 separate water districts, ranging in size from those serving 25 people (the minimum to be defined as a water district) up to millions of customers, such as the Metropolitan Water District of southern California. In thousands of these districts, repairs and replacement facilities are long overdue.

In this century, most treatment facilities have been built

with an intended lifespan of 50 years, and with a built-in projection for serving two to three times the number of users served when first opened. However, these constraints have been exceeded in thousands of locations. Many water systems plants are in disrepair, and breakdowns are common. Among those prominent in recent years:

- San Diego: The city's sewage treatment system was built in 1963, to serve a population of 250,000. It now operates near or above capacity every day, serving 1.7 million people, and breakdowns are frequent.

- New York City: Most of the city's 14 treatment plants are operating over capacity, and break down.

- Pennsylvania: In the mid-1980s, the aged municipal water systems of Scranton and McKeesport were struck by outbreaks of *giardia lamblia* parasite contamination, and had to be shut down. Water was provided by National Guard tank trucks.

Ban chlorine, get disease

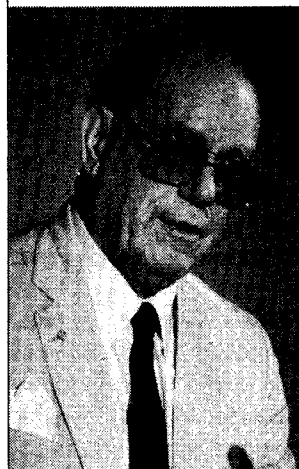
In the context of this infrastructure breakdown, any relaxation of water disinfection standards and practices in the United States could lead to epidemics of cholera, typhoid fever, and other waterborne diseases. Public health studies even indicate that current U.S. chlorination levels are actually too low to prevent many cases of some of these illnesses.

The NRDC methodology is to include low Maximum Contaminant Levels for chlorine by-products in the Safe Drinking Water Act reauthorization bill. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates that the cost across the country for equipment to remove these by-products would be nearly \$4.5 billion, and another \$500 million for operation and maintenance in the first stage of implementation.

Because of the high and often prohibitive costs, many municipalities would be forced to abandon chlorine in favor of some less effective method, such as ozonation. Chlorination is the only inexpensive, well-developed method that remains effective from the point of treatment all the way to the tap. With poorly maintained water delivery systems—and that means almost all systems in the United States today—water can become recontaminated after treatment. Ozone dissolved in the water can break down before it reaches the tap.

The NRDC has managed to include in the draft legislation an exemption from otherwise mandatory cost-benefit analysis. And no wonder. There is no established cause and effect relationship between the by-products (organochlorides) and cancer, only a "suggestion of a positive association" (the authors' own words) as a result of "meta-analysis" in a paper that was rejected by *Science*, the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, and the *American Journal*

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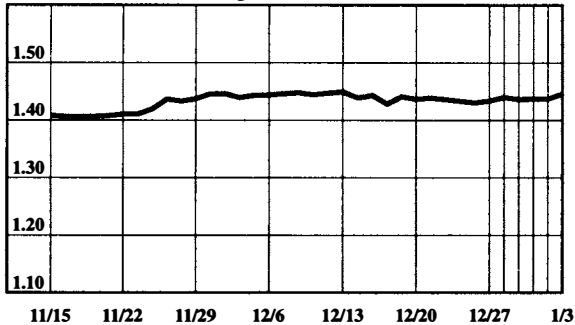
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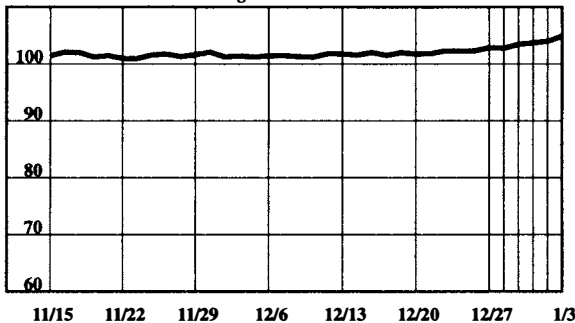
The dollar in deutschmarks

New York late afternoon fixing



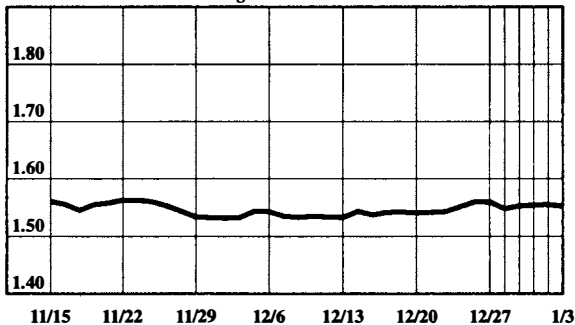
The dollar in yen

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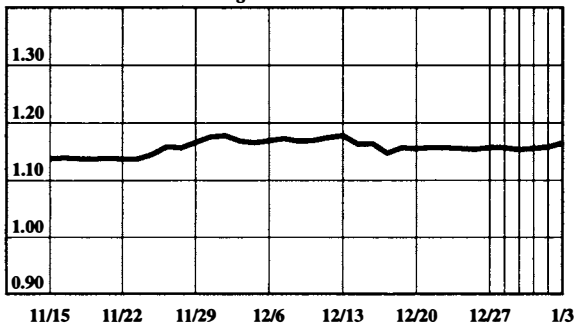
The British pound in dollars

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The dollar in Swiss francs

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of *Public Health*, before being published in the latter journal after a change of editor ("Chlorination, Chlorination By-products, and Cancer: A Meta-analysis," by Robert D. Morris et al., *AJPH*, Vol. 82, No. 7, July 1992, p. 955). The analysis was also rejected by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Even assuming a cause and effect relation between chlorine by-products and cancer, according to the Congressional Budget Office, the average expenditure involved for each avoided case of cancer lies in a range between \$867,000 and \$19 billion!

No wonder that even the EPA's own scientists question the need for this legislation. A fact sheet issued by the EPA in July 1992 reiterated that "this study does not demonstrate a causal association between chlorinated drinking water and cancer." But there is more to the EPA than its scientists. In order to respond to political pressures, the EPA permits a "regulation negotiation," in which the technical experts are no match for the NRDC's slick, high-priced lawyers.

So, in an otherwise necessary and satisfactory Safe Drinking Water Act reauthorization bill, a so-called Disinfectants/Disinfection By-Products (D/DBP) rule, has been inserted, with the NRDC's deliberate intention of causing tens of thousands of deaths annually, as one contribution to its not exactly secret vision of a North America without cities. "But hey," they lie, "it's good for the environment!"

Documentation

What the mayors and water engineers say

During the comment period on the proposed Disinfectants/Disinfection By-Products (D/DBP) rule, mayors and municipal water managers from around the country submitted many letters to the Environmental Protection Agency, which are compiled in the Drinking Water Docket (MC 4101). The following are excerpts from a few of these publicly available letters.

From P.L. Montgomery, R.S., Environmental Health Supervisor, Richmond County Health Department, Rockingham, North Carolina:

Upon reading a summary of EPA's proposed . . . rule, the Environmental Health staff wonders, "Have you gone NUTS?". . . To us, chlorination is one of the foundations of sanitation; public health; and perhaps, arguably, western civilization as we know it today.

From Wilbur J. Brown, mayor, Gilbert, Arizona:

This is a travesty, especially when considering there are no documented deaths attributed to the use of chlorine in a water supply, but a history full of murderous epidemics directly attributed to the non-use of chlorine. . . . Chlorine has proven itself to be a very effective disinfectant. Many of the alternate disinfectants are more potent. . . . What makes chlorine the best available disinfectant are other considerations: availability, cost per dosage, efficient measurement of dosage, ease of application, reliability of analytical methods to determine demand for and remaining chlorine residual. And last and perhaps the most telling, is the substantiated track record chlorine usage has in the water industry.

From Carolyn S. Armstrong, city manager, Colby, Kansas:

If EPA elects to implement this rule, many small communities will be forced into bankruptcy or will be forced to destroy the tenuous profitability of businesses within the community through increased utility rates.

From William J. Buckley, Jr., P.E., superintendent of Public Utilities, Danbury, Connecticut:

The proposed rule is not based on sound science. EPA's . . . backstop proposal for chlorination by-products is that chlorine is no longer an acceptable disinfectant, that chlorination by-products above the 40/30 levels pose a significant threat to public health. Epidemiological and toxicological evidence does not support this contention. Current disinfection by-product regulations control the *hypothetical* health risks within EPA regulatory requirements.

From George P. Fulton, P.E., district engineer, First District Water Department, Norwalk, Connecticut:

How can the EPA establish Maximum Contaminant Level limits for THMs and HAA5 when no direct connection has been established between these DBP levels and cancer? The implication that there are 10,000 new cases of colorectal cancer a year due to the drinking of water with elevated DBP levels is almost capricious. A check with cancer "professionals" should show that the causes of most such cancers are known and there is little room for such high numbers.

From David L. Rich, water production superintendent, Public Works Department, Battle Creek, Michigan:

In these days of shrinking financial resources, spending such huge sums with so much uncertainty on the benefits is irresponsible. To try to set levels, as proposed in stage 2, without finishing the research needed, is just plain stupid. The benefits of chlorine as a disinfectant have been proven over nearly 100 years of use. To radically change our disinfection process without extensive research into the need and benefits, as opposed to the risks of microbial contamination, is like playing Russian roulette with the public health.

IMF policy spreads flu across Russia

by Denise M. Henderson

A serious flu epidemic is sweeping across Russia, Ukraine, and other parts of the former Soviet Union and eastern Europe. While many health experts are alarmed over the epidemic, which is more serious than the Spanish flu that killed 100,000-plus people after World War I, few in official circles are willing to admit that its chief cause is the constantly falling standard of living in the CIS countries and eastern Europe. Budget cuts and rampant poverty have created the conditions for the spread of the flu epidemic in these areas.

According to *International Herald Tribune* reporter Michael Specter, writing on Dec. 29, "The health systems of virtually all the former republics of the Soviet Union have fared badly in the past several years. The Russian budget, for example, provides only a small fraction of the funds for preventive medicine that it once allocated. Poverty is more apparent than ever, particularly in big cities, where viruses spread most easily." And a researcher from Moscow's epidemiological center, Yuri Solodnikov, is quoted: "Viruses that used to pass by almost unnoticed now provoke serious epidemics."

The flu would not have gotten out of hand, had it not been for the fact that, for over four years now, Russia has been carrying out the prescriptions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank. Though the faces behind the policy may have changed, the policy has been constant. Russia is facing its worst harvest since the 1960s. The country's industrial base has also continued to collapse, reaching critically low levels throughout the nation. Immediately after the Russian Duma elections in December 1995, Boris Nemtsov, the governor of Nizhny Novgorod, stated that his biggest concern was the 38% collapse this year alone in the *oblast's* heavy industry base. And in Russia overall, the drop in industrial production this year was 51%.

Latest unemployment figures show that official unemployment has risen by 40% this year and now stands at 2.2 million, or 3% of the labor force. But the unofficial unemployment figure is at least twice that much.

On Nov. 17, 1995, the business magazine *Delovoy Mir* (*Business World*) ran a report by Sergei Tsukhlo, head of Marketing Survey Lab of the Institute of Economic Problems in the Transition Period. Tsukhlo's report on the decline in industry from September to November alone, was staggering.

According to Tsukhlo, "the actual *rate of industrial decline*" in November 1995, "rose to -18%, as compared to