

QUESTIONS REGARDING GENERAL PUBLIC HEALTH

Updated November, 2007

Q: Have any independent health assessments been conducted on the use of chloramine for disinfection?

A: In 2005, the CCLHO reviewed current knowledge and evidence regarding the efficacy and safety of monochloramine in drinking water. CCLHO concluded that monochloramine is better than chlorine for maintaining a small (residual) amount of disinfectant in water distribution systems where high concentrations of trihalomethanes or haloacetic acids result from chlorination. Trihalomethanes and haloacetic acids are halogenated organic compounds that increase the risks of certain cancers.

Q: Who is the CCLHO?

A: The California Conference of Local Health Officers is comprised of all legally appointed local health officers in California. In addition, physicians who are Deputy Health Officers or Assistant Health Officers may be appointed as non-voting associate members. The Conference was established by statute in 1947 to advise the California Department of Health Services (now the California Department of Public Health (CDPH)), other departments, boards, commissions, and officials of federal, state and local agencies, the Legislature and other organizations on all matters affecting health. For more information, please see:
<http://www.dhs.ca.gov/cclho/AboutUs.htm>

Q: What did the CCLHO find relative to chloramine in drinking water?

A: The CCLHO findings are documented in a March 8, 2005 letter

Q: Did the CCLHO make any recommendations?

A: Yes, the CCLHO made five recommendations.

Q: What is the SFPUC doing regarding the CCLHO recommendations?

A: The SFPUC has actively addressed all of the recommendations of the CCLHO.

- 1) SFPUC has continued monitoring for recommended water quality parameters.
- 2) SFPUC conducted routine Lead and Copper Rule (LCR) compliance monitoring in 2004 and additional monitoring in 2006. Neither lead nor copper levels were affected by chloramination in the San Francisco Regional Water System (providing water to the local Bay Area water agencies) or in the San Francisco Water System (City system). Each permitted water system is individually responsible for LCR monitoring and compliance. SFPUC provides water that complies with CDPH approved corrosion control treatment.
- 3) SFPUC considers monitoring for new and emerging contaminants as suggested by the CCLHO recommendations. For example, after concerns were raised about the presence of iodinated disinfection by-products (DBPs), SFPUC participated in a 2006 USEPA survey of iodo-HAAs and iodo-THMs. These classes of iodinated DBPs are not currently regulated and are of research interest. SFPUC monitors quarterly for another DBP of research interest, N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA). In 2007, SFPUC monitored its system for algal toxins and dissolved inorganic nitrogen (DON) since these groups of contaminants are also of research interest. SFPUC monitors for contaminants at ever lower analytical levels; e.g., arsenic was recently monitored at a detection limit five times lower than previously. SFPUC laboratory now has capabilities of molecular detection of various groups of bacteria in the source and treated water.
- 4) The SFPUC has actively promoted liaisons with the health departments in Alameda, San Francisco, San Mateo, Santa Clara and Tuolumne counties to monitor and communicate about emerging health issues potentially related to drinking water quality. In 2007, SFPUC initiated a Water Quality Planning Study, engaging with federal, state and local health professionals as well as water agencies and citizens groups to scope out new and emerging water quality issues for a 30 year planning horizon.
- 5) The SFPUC communicates and cooperates routinely with local health departments, professional associations and national experts to address and monitor water quality issues, not only about disinfection practices, but many other issues such as cryptosporidiosis, mycobacterium avium complex, and emergency planning. SFPUC has requested a review of its chloramination practices by national experts and communicated the concerns to the health agencies and at professional conferences. The 2007 Water Quality Planning Study is looking at a broad spectrum of possible emerging contaminants and issues that may become of importance in the future. Similarly, SFPUC has engaged national experts and received input from major water utilities in this endeavor.