



## **Facts About Hexavalent Chromium (Chromium 6)**

Hexavalent chromium, also called chromium 6, came to the public's attention with the 2000 release of the movie Erin Brockovich, which focused on the contaminated drinking water of Hinkley, California. Hexavalent chromium is a heavy metal used in producing pigments, leather tanning, electroplating, metal processing, wood preservation, and in alloys such as stainless steel. It was also used to inhibit corrosion in cooling towers - the use that contaminated Hinkley's water. Drinking water sources can become contaminated by leaks and discharges from industrial facilities and hazardous waste sites.

### **13 Million Californians' Health Threatened**

From 1997 through 2008 hexavalent chromium was detected in 2,208 drinking water supplies, across 52 out of 58 counties, including sources serving schools and hospitals. This means that over 13 million Californians in over 500 communities have hexavalent chromium in their tap water. Individual counties may have numerous impacted communities and show a wide range of contamination levels.

### **Known Health Effects**

Hexavalent chromium, which was added to [California's Proposition 65 list](#) (pdf) in December 2008, is a known carcinogen and a reproductive toxicant. Exposure can occur through ingestion of contaminated water, and can cause acute gastroenteritis, gastrointestinal hemorrhage, ulcers, and kidney and liver damage. Workers and residents near industrial facilities using hexavalent chromium are particularly at risk given their long term, high levels of exposure.

## **No Drinking Water Standard**

Despite severe health threats posed by hexavalent chromium, there is no national or state drinking water standard. Instead, it is regulated as "total chromium," which means that drinking water suppliers do not differentiate between the toxic (hexavalent) form and non-toxic chromium. The result is that drinking water supplies can legally contain unsafe levels of hexavalent chromium. To fix that problem, the California legislature passed [SB 351 \(Ortiz\)](#) in 2001, requiring the state to establish a drinking water standard specifically for hexavalent chromium by 2004. It is now 2012 and California still does not have a drinking water standard for hexavalent chromium, putting the state in violation of its own law!

## **Polluter Delays and Regulatory Inaction**

The first step in establishing a [drinking water standard](#) is determining the safe level of the contaminant by setting a [Public Health Goal \(PHG\)](#). After years of delay due to political and polluter influence, the State adopted a health protective PHG of [.02 parts per billion](#) in July 2011. It is now up to the Department of Public Health (DPH) to set an enforceable drinking water standard as close to the PHG as technical and economic considerations allow. In recent meetings with DPH, Clean Water Action has been informed that they hope to release a draft standard in July 2013, though thanks to both a public comment process and administrative procedures, they would expect that we wouldn't see a final standard for another 4 years or more.

**4 more years of delay is unacceptable. Please take a moment to urge Governor Brown to intervene in order to ensure that California cuts through the red tape and establishes a health protective drinking water standard for hexavalent chromium swiftly.**