

Group sees toxic brew: Perchlorate in both formula and water

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WASHINGTON — Advocacy group Environmental Working Group (EWG) is warning in [research](#) released April 2 that some infants potentially are exposed to unsafe levels of the chemical perchlorate with their intake of perchlorate-containing powdered infant formula that is reconstituted with drinking water containing “safe” levels of perchlorate.

The group is basing its warning on a recent study conducted by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). CDC researchers, who published their findings in the March 2009 edition of the *Journal of Exposure Science and Environmental Epidemiology*, found that 15 brands of powdered infant formula are contaminated with perchlorate, a rocket fuel component detected in drinking water in 28 states and territories. Perchlorate occurs both in nature and as a manmade chemical; its contamination of drinking water is usually associated with defense installations where it may have been dumped in the ground.

The two most contaminated infant formula brands, made from cow’s milk, accounted for 87 percent of the US powdered formula market in 2000, according to the scientists.

According to the EWG, the CDC study said that reconstituting cow’s milk/lactose formula with water contaminated with “even minimal amounts” of perchlorate (or 4 parts per billion [ppb]) would cause 54 percent of the infants consuming the mix to exceed the so-called “safe” dose set by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

In fact, EWG reported that many scientists contend that the EPA “safe” level is too high to protect public health. Studies have established that the chemical is a potent thyroid toxin that may interfere with fetal and infant brain development.

Anila Jacob, M.D., M.P.H., an EWG senior scientist, said in an April 2 [press release](#), “As this unprecedented study demonstrates, infants fed cow’s milk-based powdered formula could be exposed to perchlorate from two sources — tap water and formula. That suggests that millions of American babies are potentially at risk.”

The EWG said that the CDC scientists noted in their research that the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) requires infant formula to be supplemented with iodine, a nutrient that can counteract the negative effects of perchlorate on the thyroid gland. However, they estimated that those brands that contain only the minimum iodine concentration would leave infants iodine-deficient and thus more vulnerable to the toxic effects of perchlorate.

The EWG is calling for the EPA to set a legally enforceable safe drinking water level that protects pregnant women, infants and others who are most vulnerable to perchlorate’s effects.