

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility News Release (www.peer.org)

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RADIATION EXPOSURE DEBATE RAGES INSIDE EPA — Plan to Radically Hike Post-Accident Radiation in Food & Water Sparks Hot Dissent

Washington, DC — A plan awaiting approval by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that would dramatically increase permissible radioactive releases in drinking water, food and soil after “radiological incidents” is drawing vigorous objections from agency experts, according to agency documents released today by Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER). At issue is the acceptable level of public health risk following a radiation release, whether an accidental spill or a “dirty bomb” attack.

The radiation arm of EPA, called the Office of Radiation and Indoor Air (ORIA), has prepared an update of the 1992 “Protective Action Guides” (PAG) governing radiation protection decisions for both short-term and long-term cleanup standards. Other divisions within EPA contend the ORIA plan geometrically raises allowable exposure to the public. For example, as Charles Openchowski of EPA’s Office of General Counsel wrote in a January 23, 2009 e-mail to ORIA:

“[T]his guidance would allow cleanup levels that exceed MCLs [Maximum Contamination Limits under the Safe Drinking Water Act] by a factor of 100, 1000, and in two instances 7 million and there is nothing to prevent those levels from being the final cleanup achieved (i.e., it’s not confined to immediate response of emergency phase).”

Another EPA official, Stuart Walker of the Office of Superfund Remediation and Technology Innovation, explains what the proposed new radiation limits in drinking water would mean:

“It also appears that drinking water at the PAG concentrations...may lead to subchronic (acute) effects following exposures of a day or a week. In a population, one should see some express acute effects...that is vomiting, fever, etc.”

“This critical debate is taking place entirely behind closed doors because this plan is ‘guidance’ and does not require public notice as a regulation would,” stated PEER Counsel Christine Erickson. Today, PEER sent EPA Administrator Lisa Jackson a letter calling for a more open and broader examination of the proposed radiation guidance. “We all deserve to know why some in the agency want to legitimize exposing the public to radiation at levels vastly higher than what EPA officially considers dangerous.”

The internal documents show that under the updated PAG a single glass of water could give a lifetime’s permissible exposure. In addition, it would allow long-term cleanup limits thousands of times more lax than anything EPA has ever before accepted. These new limits would cause a cancer in as much as every fourth person exposed.

PEER obtained the internal e-mails after filing a lawsuit this past fall under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) but the EPA has yet to turn over thousands more communications. “EPA touts its new transparency but when it comes to matters of controversy the agency still puts up a wall,” added Erickson, who filed the FOIA suit. “Besides the months of stonewalling, we are seeing them pull stunts such as ORIA giving us rebuttals to other EPA documents they have yet to release.”

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[Examine the Office of General Counsel e-mail](#)

[Look at the Office of Superfund Remediation and Technology Innovation concerns](#)

[Read the PEER letter to Administrator Jackson](#)

[See tables detailing how many times more radiation the PAG would allow](#)

[View the PEER lawsuit and additional background on the issue](#)