

EPA pledges to review chromium in water

By Michael Hawthorne, Chicago Tribune

The nation's top environmental regulator on Tuesday promised to complete a scientific review of hexavalent chromium by summer and consider ordering cities to start testing for the toxic metal in tap water.

During a meeting with senators from Illinois and six other states, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lisa Jackson said new research may lead to an overhaul of federal regulations limiting chromium, a metal that occurs naturally in the environment but also is discharged into water and air by steel mills and other industries.

A study released this week by the Environmental Working Group, a nonprofit research and advocacy organization, found hexavalent chromium, also known as chromium-6, in tap water from 31 cities. The amount in Lake Michigan water pumped to 7 million people in Chicago and its suburbs was 0.18 parts per billion, three times higher than a safety limit proposed last year by California officials.

The EPA now limits and requires water testing only for total chromium, a standard that includes another form of the metal, chromium-3, an essential nutrient. Critics say federal rules, last updated in 1992, need to be strengthened to reflect the latest science that links chromium-6 to stomach cancer.

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