

EPA takes new approach to protecting drinking water and public health



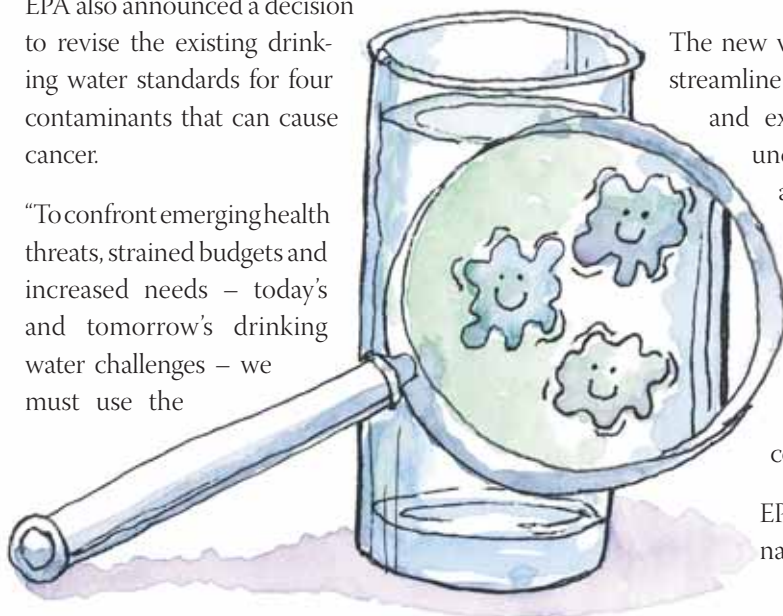
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is taking a new approach to expand public health protection for drinking water by going beyond the traditional framework that addresses contaminants one at a time.

EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson announced March 23 that the agency is developing a broad new set of strategies in this area. According to EPA, its aim is to find solutions that meet the health and economic needs of communities across the country more effectively than the current approach.

EPA also announced a decision to revise the existing drinking water standards for four contaminants that can cause cancer.

“To confront emerging health threats, strained budgets and increased needs – today’s and tomorrow’s drinking water challenges – we must use the

law more effectively and promote new technologies,” said Jackson. “That means fostering innovation that can increase cost-effective protection. It means finding win-win-win solutions for our health, our environment and our economy. And it means broad collaboration. To make our drinking water systems work harder, we have to work smarter.”



The new vision is meant to streamline decision-making and expand protection under existing law and promote cost-effective new technologies to meet the needs of rural, urban and other water-stressed communities.

EPA is initiating a national conversa-

tion that will allow for public input on better ways to address contaminants in groups, improve drinking water technology, and more effectively address potential risks to give Americans greater confidence in the quality of their drinking water.

EPA will focus on four principles that will provide greater protection of drinking water:

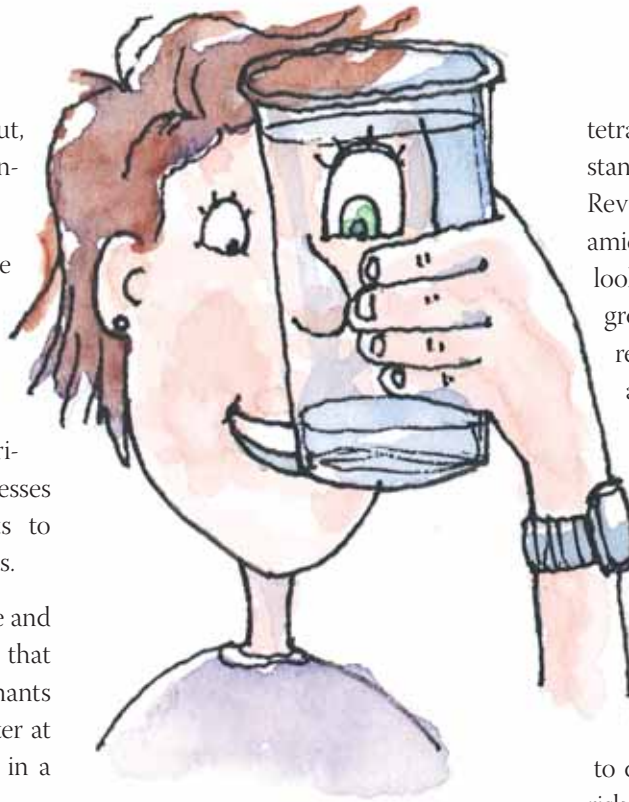
1. Address contaminants as a group rather than one at a time so that enhancement of drinking water protection can be achieved cost-effectively.
2. Foster development of new drinking water treatment technologies to address health risks posed by a broad array of contaminants.
3. Use the authority of multiple statutes to help protect drinking water.
4. Partner with states to share more complete data from monitoring at public water systems.

EPA’s current approach to drinking water protection is focused on a detailed assessment of each individual contaminant of concern and can take many years. This approach not only results in slow progress in addressing unregulated contaminants but also fails to take advantage of strategies for enhancing health protection cost-effectively, including advanced treatment technologies that address several contaminants at once. The outlined vision seeks to use existing authorities to achieve greater protection more quickly and cost-effectively.

Over the coming months, EPA will be seeking input from the public and stakeholders, including utilities, rural communities and states, in developing its new approach. Its methods of gathering input will include public meetings, webcasts, the EPA website, and workshops on drinking water technologies.

The ways that EPA plans to gather input, corresponding to the four new principles above, include, among others:

1. Engaging stakeholders and the public to develop technical and procedural approaches to group contaminants, identify treatment technologies, and consider adverse health effects; as appropriate, use an approach that addresses groups of similar contaminants to develop drinking water regulations.
2. Hold field demonstrations of large and small water treatment systems that address a broad suite of contaminants while providing safe drinking water at reasonable and predictable costs in a sustainable way.
3. More fully explore EPA's chemical action plans being developed and implemented to identify synergies that can help to improve and better understand drinking water quality. This can provide the opportunity to regulate contaminants before they get into drinking water.
4. Enhance compilation and analyses of public water systems' information to strengthen the review of potential drinking water public health concerns without additional information-collection burdens and requests on states.



Stricter standards appropriate for four contaminants

EPA said it also continues to look for opportunities to increase protection using traditional approaches. In the newly finalized review of existing drinking water standards, EPA determined that scientific advances allow for stricter regulations for the carcinogenic compounds tetrachloroethylene, trichloroethylene, acrylamide and epichlorohydrin.

Tetrachloroethylene and trichloroethylene are used in industrial and/or textile processing and can be introduced into drinking water from contaminated ground or surface water sources. Acrylamide and epichlorohydrin are impurities that can be introduced into drinking water during the water treatment process.

Within the next year, EPA will initiate rulemaking efforts to revise the

tetrachloroethylene and trichloroethylene standards using the strategy's framework. Revision of epichlorohydrin and acrylamide standards will follow later. As EPA looks at its new approach to addressing groups, the agency will consider whether revisions to these standards fit into that approach.

Ongoing regulatory actions

There are ongoing efforts on 14 other drinking water standards. For example, EPA is considering further revisions to the lead and copper rule in order to better address risks to children. EPA also has ongoing health risk assessments or information gathering for chromium, fluoride, arsenic, and atrazine. EPA continues to consider whether to regulate perchlorate. When these efforts are complete, should additional action be required, EPA will move ahead to address any risks in an expedited manner.

EPA said it is critical to enhance drinking water protection to address the growing number of contaminants. By pursuing these sets of goals outlined above, EPA said it seeks to provide more robust public health protection in an open and transparent manner, identify cost- and energy-efficient treatment technologies and to collaborate more broadly with states, the drinking water industry, public health professionals, technology developers and manufacturers and the public to address this challenge.

More information on the strategy: www.epa.gov/safewater/sdwa/dwstrategy.html

More information on the six-year review: www.epa.gov/safewater/review.html ■

