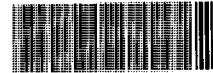


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## EPA Withdrawal Of Dioxin Remediation Goals Creates Cleanup Uncertainty



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EPA's decision to scrap its interim remediation goals for dioxin-contaminated sites is creating major uncertainty over how the agency will determine cleanup standards for the sites, sources say, because EPA says it will make decisions using its new dioxin risk assessment -- even though the agency has yet to release a key portion of that study.

EPA withdrew the cleanup targets, known as interim preliminary remediation goals (PRGs), from White House Office of Management & Budget (OMB) review April 6. EPA sent the long-stalled goals for review Aug. 10, 2010, and activists had been pushing for their release in order to drive stricter cleanups at dioxin-contaminated sites.

The proposed interim PRGs were significantly stricter than the agency's existing PRGs established in 1998. The proposed PRGs for dioxins in soil were 72 parts per trillion (ppt) at residential sites and 950 ppt at commercial or industrial sites, compared to the 1998 PRGs of 1,000 ppt for residential soil and 20,000 ppt for commercial soil.

EPA, in a statement to *Inside EPA*, says the interim goals are no longer necessary because EPA recently released one part of its dioxin risk assessment. The long-running Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) assessment of dioxin has been under development for more than two decades. EPA decided to bifurcate the assessment, and the portion it released earlier this year addressed the non-cancer risks from dioxin. The cancer portion is still pending.

The non-cancer portion sets an oral reference dose (RfD) -- or amount below which EPA expects no adverse health effects if ingested daily for a lifetime -- of 0.7 picograms per kilogram bodyweight per day (pg/kg-day)e-1. It is more stringent than earlier dioxin risk estimates, though the pending cancer risk numbers are expected to be even stricter.

EPA says now that the non-cancer RfD for dioxin is public, the agency will use it to help inform site cleanup decisions and no longer needs the interim PRGs. The spokeswoman adds that "EPA will not be issuing a [new] national PRG for dioxin because, with the RfD available, EPA regions will be following the Agency's toxicity hierarchy approach for determining site-specific PRGs using the IRIS toxicity value. This hierarchy designates IRIS toxicity values as Tier 1, which means IRIS is the first information source to consider when undertaking risk assessments."

The spokeswoman says the agency will not wait for the cancer portion of the IRIS assessment to make additional cleanup decisions. "EPA will use the RfD and existing cancer toxicity values for site decisions as laid out in the Agency risk assessment guidance and the toxicity hierarchy approach," the spokeswoman says. "In the absence of an IRIS value, EPA evaluates other sources of toxicity values. For dioxin, the Agency has considered EPA's Health Assessment Document cancer slope factor (CSF) for dioxin and California EPA's dioxin CSF, which are similar."

It is unclear what EPA's health assessment document says on a dioxin CSF. California EPA in 2002 published a CSF of 1.3e-4 (pg/kg-day)e-1. Industry sources have said that they anticipate the new IRIS CSF could be the same as what EPA estimated in its 2010 draft, a very strict 1x10e6 per milligram per kilogram per day.

EPA's website says PRGs generally are chemical-specific concentration goals for specific media, such as soil uses, at Superfund, federal facilities and Resource Conservation & Recovery Act (RCRA) sites.

"These goals normally should both be protective of human health and the environment and comply with all applicable, relevant and appropriate regulations for all exposure pathways being addressed . . . It is important to note that PRGs are not intended to act as site-specific cleanup levels; rather they are intended to serve as initial guidelines for use in scoping characterization and remediation alternatives at Superfund, federal facilities, and RCRA sites. Final cleanup levels for a site typically would be developed by modifying the PRGs based on consideration of site specific factors (e.g., exposure

frequency of acceptable cancer risk level)," the agency's website says.

EPA says it generally calculates two sets of PRGs, one based on cancer effects and one based on non-cancer effects, the "more conservative" value typically is then selected as the recommended PRG.

A source with the activist group Center for Health, Environment & Justice says EPA's scrapping of the interim PRGs is "an outrage" and says it creates uncertainty over EPA's approach to dioxin site cleanups.

"EPA's proposed cleanup levels for dioxin have been in limbo for nearly two years and they are now abandoning them all of a sudden," the source says. "This sounds like it will be, 'Let's make a deal!' from site to site. Some sites could be cleaned up to protective levels, and who knows what some other sites might be cleaned up to. Communities deserve equal protection from dioxin, one of the most toxic chemicals on the planet," the source adds.

The source also criticizes EPA's statement that the agency can make cleanup decisions based on the non-cancer portion of its dioxin IRIS study, saying EPA should base cleanup decisions on cancer effects.

However, as an interim measure as the agency finalizes the cancer portion of the study, EPA should move forward and finalize new PRGs using the non-cancer risk numbers from the assessment, the source adds.

**Although environmentalists are criticizing the agency's decision, the move to scrap** the interim cleanup goals is drawing praise from industry groups and others that had raised concerns over the PRGs under OMB review.

Many critics of the interim cleanup goals -- including industry, Republicans, the Defense Department and NASA among others -- questioned the rationale of beginning site cleanups with an interim PRG when EPA could, in the middle of a multi-year cleanup, publish the dioxin IRIS numbers and the cleanup targets could change.

"We said [when the PRGs were released in 2009] that EPA should really focus on the risk assessment . . . because if the risk assessment comes up with something different you force people to clean up to different standards," says a spokesman for the American Chemistry Council, a chemical industry association.

"We support [EPA's] decision to withdraw its proposed guidance on developing an interim preliminary remediation goal for dioxin in residential soil," according to a statement the spokesman provided.

"Today, government agencies are able to make soil remediation decisions with existing guidance, including the recently released non-cancer dioxin reassessment. Environmental levels of dioxin have declined dramatically over the past two decades, and EPA's decision reaffirms that current guidelines are effective," the spokesman says.

A federal agency source adds that the interim PRGs were based on old data because the updated IRIS assessment had yet to be released. The source calls EPA's withdrawal of the PRGs "a good move." The source adds, "Those PRGs were old before the assessments came out. Now we can use this [RfD] instead."

The source says that "we've gotten indicators" from the agency that EPA does not expect the cancer portion of the IRIS assessment, when it is released, to alter cleanup decisions. "But it's always a risk when you split an assessment," the source acknowledges. It is unclear when EPA will release the dioxin cancer document. -- *Maria Hegstad*

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