



## Senator Feinstein Criticizes Defense Department for Shirking Responsibility to Study Health Impact of Perchlorate Contamination

January 11, 2006

**Washington, DC** – Senator Dianne Feinstein is criticizing recent efforts by the Defense Department to evade its Congressionally mandated requirement to perform studies on the health impact of perchlorate, a chemical used for explosives, rockets, and missiles. Senator Feinstein is questioning recent claims by the Defense Department that it has fulfilled its responsibility, when, in fact, it has not yet satisfied its legal obligation to do so.

**“Despite the Department’s claims, this critical work still remains incomplete,”** Senator Feinstein said in a letter to Defense Department Secretary Donald Rumsfeld. **“By shirking responsibility for performing thorough and exhaustive studies on the impact of perchlorate, the Defense Department is putting the health of thousands of Americans at risk. I urge you to direct the Defense Department to conduct further studies.”**

In sufficient doses, perchlorate has been shown to impair thyroid function and result in neurological impairment of fetuses and babies, metabolic disorders and other problems. Nationwide monitoring has found that perchlorate has endangered the water supply of 34 States, including California.

Most of the perchlorate contamination across the country is from Defense-related activities and as such the Department has a responsibility to the American people to clean up the groundwater and drinking water sources impaired by those activities. Section 323 of the Fiscal Year 2004 Department of Defense Authorization bill mandated studies to respond to serious concerns over the impact of this contamination, particularly on at-risk populations, such as infants, toddlers, pregnant women and their unborn children, and those with compromised immune systems.

Following is the text of the letter Senator Feinstein sent to Rumsfeld, urging the Department to fulfill its obligation to perform the required perchlorate studies. Senator Feinstein also sent similar letters to Senators John Warner and Carl Levin, Chairman and Ranking Member, respectively, of the Senate Armed Services Committee:

January 10, 2006

The Honorable Donald Rumsfeld  
Secretary  
Department of Defense  
1000 Defense Pentagon  
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing you to question recent claims by Kenneth Krieg, the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions, Technology, and Logistics, that the Department of Defense that it has fulfilled its obligation to perform studies on the epidemiological impact of perchlorate contamination. In fact, despite the Department's claims, this critical work still remains incomplete. By shirking responsibility for performing thorough and exhaustive studies on the impact of perchlorate, the Defense Department is putting the health of thousands of Americans at risk. I urge you to direct the Defense Department to conduct further studies.

The Defense Department is the largest user of perchlorate in the country. Since the 1940's, perchlorate has been used as an oxidizing agent in explosives, rockets, and missiles. In sufficient doses, studies have show the chemical can impair thyroid function and result in neurological impairment of fetuses and babies, metabolic disorders and other problems. Additionally, perchlorate has been found in the breast milk of women from around the country.

Nationwide monitoring has found that perchlorate has endangered the water supply of 34 States, including California. Most of the perchlorate contamination across the country is from Defense-related activities and as such the Department has a responsibility to the American people to clean up the groundwater and drinking water sources impaired by those activities.

Accordingly, Section 323 of the Fiscal Year 2004 Department of Defense Authorization bill mandated studies to respond to serious concerns over the impact of this contamination, particularly on at-risk populations, such as infants, toddlers, pregnant women and their unborn children, and those with compromised immune systems.

In letters to both the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, Kenneth Krieg, Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisitions, Technology, and Logistics claimed that a January 2005 National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study, entitled "Health Implications of Perchlorate Ingestion," represented an "exhaustive review of the epidemiological and toxicological literature focused on the potential effects of perchlorate exposure on the human thyroid gland." However, this assertion is only partially true. The primary study used by the NAS to develop a perchlorate reference dose focused only on healthy adults. At the time of the study, there was very limited literature addressing the effect of perchlorate on children.

In fact, the National Academy of Science identified this weakness in its study, specifically emphasizing that "no studies have investigated the relationship between perchlorate exposure and adverse outcomes among especially vulnerable groups, such as low-birthweight or

preterm infants.” Specifically, the report noted that no direct human data were available regarding possible interaction between maternal iodide intake and fetus exposure to perchlorate.

Children may be vulnerable to perchlorate because it has been shown to reduce the production of thyroid hormone. This hormone plays a critical role in development, and insufficient levels can permanently damage a child’s physical and mental abilities. According to the NAS study the current “epidemiologic evidence is inadequate to determine whether or not there is a causal association between perchlorate exposure and adverse neurodevelopmental outcomes in children.”

Therefore, the Department of Defense still must fulfill its obligations and complete thorough and exhaustive studies on the true health impact of perchlorate. Until these studies are completed, I will urge the Armed Services Committees to reject the Defense Department’s attempts to evade this important responsibility.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein  
United States Senator

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