



State water board must set limit on carcinogen in water

By Asha Kreiling | December 8, 2016



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Photo: Emily Wathen / Environmental Working Group



Bartolo Chavez, resident and community activist of Arvin, California.



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2009.

The chemical, **1,2,3-Trichloropropane**, has been detected in hundreds of wells all over California, but more than half are in the agriculturally rich San Joaquin Valley. The contamination stems from its use in pesticides.

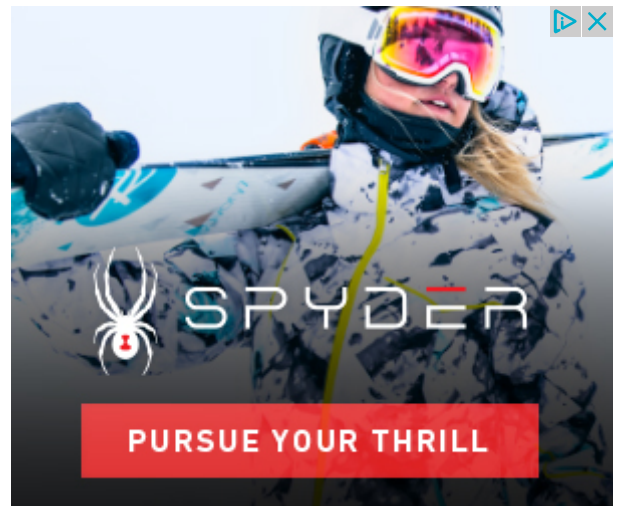
For nearly a year, my organization has hosted workshops in communities impacted by high 1,2,3-TCP levels. I have frequently visited Arvin, a rural Kern County town south of Bakersfield, where the majority of residents are low-income, Latino workers. Crop fields and oil pumpjacks dominate the landscape. Poverty and pollution are pervasive.

When we tell residents about 1,2,3-TCP contamination and associated cancer risks, many are devastated, but seemingly unsurprised, as if this isn't the first time the government has let them down. Communities all over California are waiting for water justice. That's why Arvin resident Bartolo Chavez drove five hours to testify before the state water board in Sacramento, urging it to take action for clean water.

I'm advocating for the board to set a maximum contaminant level of 5 parts per trillion — the level at which it can be detected.

Shell Oil and Dow Chemical are also paying close attention. Their carelessness 30 years ago caused nearly all of the 1,2,3-TCP contamination we see in California, and they know they will be on the hook to pay for cleanup costs once a maximum contaminant level is adopted.

Shell and Dow manufactured D-D and Telone, two pesticides containing 1,2,3-TCP that were applied extensively to farmland prior to the 1980s. Thanks to memos uncovered by lawsuits, we know the two companies were aware that 1,2,3-TCP causes cancer and other health effects. They also knew it served no function in killing agricultural pests. The companies decided to leave 1,2,3-TCP in their products to avoid the costs to remove it.



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This was avoidable.

The state water board must prioritize public health when developing a new drinking water standard, but must also consider the economic impacts of water treatment and the feasibility of detecting the contaminant. In this case, there are responsible parties that can afford the costs of water treatment.

The public comment period for the proposed maximum contaminant level begins in a few weeks. People like Chavez have taken action, but Californians across the state need to urge the board to set the most health-protective level: 5 parts per trillion. You can submit comments, with subject line “1,2,3-TCP Maximum Contaminant Level,” to commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov.

Asha Kreiling is the policy and communications analyst for the Community Water Center.

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