
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Saturday, October 15, 2005

On chloramine

Editor -- As a health professional, I would like to clarify three important points that Denise Johnson-Kula referred to in her October 9 Open Forum commentary.

First, there is no scientific evidence that chloramine causes the wide variety of symptoms mentioned in Johnson-Kula's commentary. The county health departments cooperatively investigated the health complaints made by residents of San Mateo and Santa Clara counties. They found no reason to suspect that the change in drinking water disinfectant was responsible for the diverse health problems. The complaints were reported by approximately 20 individuals out of the 2.4 million who receive the SFPUC's drinking water.

Second, the World Health Organization includes chloramine in all its documentation of acceptable residual disinfectants, and WHO acknowledges its principal health benefit that "The use of chloramines for disinfection instead of chlorine reduces the formation of THMs in drinking-water supplies." THMs are cancer-causing substances, and by applying a residual disinfectant that reduces their formation, the SFPUC has chosen a treatment technology that is beneficial to the health of all of its users.

Lastly, the California Conference of Local Health Officers is not a research organization and would not be expected to conduct any research studies. In its role to provide a state/local forum for the discussion of health issues and develop policy recommendations, the California Conference of Local Health Officers considered the available scientific evidence and issued a statement reasserting the efficacy and safety of chloramine as a water disinfectant.

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