



January 18, 2022

Jared Blumenfeld, Secretary
California Environmental Protection Agency
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Use of best available data and science in development of state drinking water standards.

Dear Secretary Blumenfeld:

On behalf of the Southern California Water Coalition, I'm pleased to share with you a white paper that reviews the current regulatory construct, and makes recommendations, related to the use of best available data and science in the development of public health goals for California drinking water quality standards. We look forward to an ongoing dialogue with Cal-EPA and the broader California regulatory and regulated community regarding public health goal and drinking water standards development.

The Southern California Water Committee (SCWC) was created in 1983, in response to drought, to coordinate the activities of counties, special districts, and the business community in the stewardship and protection of Southern California's water supplies. Our members come from Kern, Ventura, Los Angeles, Orange, San Bernardino, Riverside, Imperial and San Diego Counties.

Good science is a necessary foundation for effective regulation. In California's water-constrained future, protecting public health and safety while preserving access to affordable drinking water supplies will require greater precision in assessing and regulating health risks from exposure to existing and emerging drinking water contaminants.

To date, the Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment (OEHHA) has relied largely on assumptions to account for data gaps and uncertainties in understanding how chemical exposures affect people, especially those who may be more sensitive than the average person. However, for a growing number of drinking water contaminants, this default approach is no longer necessary or advisable because newer, more robust data and scientific methods can support more accurate risk estimates.





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In these cases, continued reliance on the default approach will tend to overestimate health risks and drive drinking water standards to levels that are lower than necessary to protect public health. These decisions create new challenges for systems that are already struggling with pre-existing conditions, including aging infrastructure, groundwater overdraft, uncertain access to alternative water supplies or financial assistance from the state, conservation mandates and a growing suite of regulated contaminants. Moreover, many lower income ratepayers cannot continue to absorb sharp increases in water rates.

California's Human Right to Water Act (AB 685, 2012) requires that state agencies adopt policies and regulations that help achieve and maintain safe, clean, affordable and accessible drinking water for all Californians. Achieving these goals will require a level of cooperation between the lead agencies – OEHHA and the State Water Resources Control Board – that has not existed in the history of California's drinking water program. It will also require a renewed commitment to scientific due diligence in development of new PHGs, and in reviews of existing PHGs where updated scientific information indicates that the subject contaminant may pose a different risk than the agency previously determined.

The attached paper explores these and related issues in greater detail in the interest of realigning state drinking water risk assessment policy with the Human Right to Water Act, and to support more sustainable outcomes for drinking water purveyors and the people they serve. We look forward to working with Cal-EPA, OEHHA and the SWRCB on the course corrections necessary to achieve this shared goal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles Wilson", is written over a light blue circular background.

Charles Wilson
Executive Director





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cc: Dr. Lauren Zeise, Director, Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment
Joaquin Esquivel, Chair, State Water Resources Control Board
Members, State Water Resources Control Board
Eileen Sobeck, Executive Officer, State Water Resources Control Board
Darrin Polhemus, State Water Resources Control Board
Christine Hironaka, Office of the Governor
Angela Pontes, Office of the Governor

