

Perchlorate

In 2004, the Washington Aqueduct tested the Potomac River for perchlorate and detected very low levels. The Aqueduct used a new laboratory method that is more sensitive than previously used methods (this method is not yet approved by EPA). The results ranged from no detection to 1.8 ppb entering into the distribution system.

As a result of this testing, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region III (EPA) office is investigating potential sources of perchlorate in the Potomac River basin. EPA's Drinking Water, Waste Water Discharge and Superfund Programs are cooperating on information gathering and special monitoring in several areas of the Potomac Basin to gain a better understanding on how perchlorate may be entering the River. EPA is taking a close look at point source dischargers (facilities that dispose of waste water into the River) and hazardous waste sites and facilities known to produce or process perchlorate. EPA is also aware that as newer, more sensitive laboratory methods for perchlorate detection have been put to use in 2004, very low levels of the perchlorate (less than 1 part per billion) have been detected in many water bodies across the country, including the Potomac River. This new information is now being considered as perchlorate source tracking efforts in the Potomac River get underway in 2005.

The GAO recently published their study of perchlorate in the United States and the reported health risks associated with perchlorate (www.gao.gov/new.items/d05462.pdf). The report noted, "EPA revised its reference dose to a level that is equivalent to 24.5 ppb in drinking water. The reference dose is not a drinking water standard; it is a scientific estimate of the total daily exposure level from all sources that is not expected to cause adverse effects in humans, including the most sensitive populations."