

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 18, 2019

The Honorable Andrew Wheeler
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Wheeler:

We write to you today to express our concern with the lack of progress by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in establishing a safe drinking water standard for hexavalent chromium, or chromium-6. The EPA has the potential to protect the health of hundreds of millions of Americans by expeditiously establishing this standard.

Chromium-6 is a naturally-occurring chemical, but it is most prevalent as a byproduct of industrial processes. Exposure to chromium-6 can cause skin irritation or ulcers, kidney damage, liver damage, as well as circulatory and nervous tissue damage. It has also been found to cause cancer, and the EPA even lists it as a known carcinogen.¹ In 2017, the Environmental Working Group – a non-profit, nonpartisan organization dedicated to protecting human health and the environment – estimated that over 200 million Americans may be exposed to drinking water with potentially unsafe levels of chromium-6.² In their review, the Environmental Working Group found that, in some places within the Houston, Texas, area as well as numerous cities in California and Arizona, the rates of chromium-6 in drinking water were significantly higher than the recommended health level of .02 parts per billion established by scientists for the State of California.³

These startling facts and the risks chromium-6 exposure pose to a majority of our population should be of paramount concern to the EPA. Unfortunately, the EPA has reacted slowly in its review of this chemical. Their assessment, also known as the Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS)⁴ Program, first began in 2010 and we were pleased when the EPA began requiring testing reporting from thousands of public water systems to assess the amount of chromium-6 in drinking water nationwide starting in 2013. We understood this requirement, which was part of the EPA's third unregulated contaminant monitoring rule (UCMR3)⁵, to be the first step in the EPA's assessment of a safe drinking water standard for chromium-6. EPA required this reporting for two years, from 2013 to 2015; yet, four years since the reporting period concluded, the EPA still has

¹ https://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/iris/iris_documents/documents/toxreviews/0144tr.pdf, page 31

² <https://www.ewg.org/tapwater/contaminant.php?contamcode=1080& ga=2.244875405.946413195.1570023932-1709014197.1568988110#.WWjvOtMrKks>

³ 0.02 parts per billion for chromium-6 is the concentration defined by the California Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment as a public health goal, the level at which no significant health or cancer risk is posed.

⁴ https://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/iris2/chemicalLanding.cfm?substance_nmbr=144#tab-3

⁵ https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2015-10/documents/ucmr3_factsheet_general.pdf

not moved beyond the first step in its assessment process. Earlier this year, the EPA announced it was releasing preliminary materials as part of the first step of the assessment.

As Members representing congressional districts likely to have unsafe levels of chromium-6 in the water supply, we find the pace of this assessment unacceptable. We request a timely explanation on why it has taken the EPA nearly a decade to determine what level of chromium-6, a chemical the agency has identified as carcinogenic, is safe for drinking water. We respectfully request that you take the necessary steps to ensure the EPA's assessment of chromium-6 moves expeditiously. Finally, we request that you respond to this letter with a detailed update on the status of your agency's assessment of chromium-6, as well as an expected timeline for completion of the assessment.

We thank you for your attention to this urgent matter and we look forward to your response.

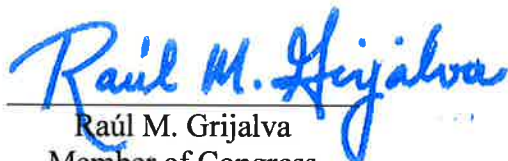
Sincerely,



Al Green
Member of Congress



Adam B. Schiff
Member of Congress



Raúl M. Grijalva
Member of Congress



Sheila Jackson Lee
Member of Congress



Debbie Dingell
Member of Congress



Andy Levin
Member of Congress



Ro Khanna
Member of Congress



Rashida Tlaib
Member of Congress



Veronica Escobar
Member of Congress



TJ Cox
Member of Congress



Nydia Velázquez
Member of Congress



Lizzie Fletcher
Member of Congress