

Alfred M. Anthony
Mayor

Council Members:
Edward Meinhardt
Rudy Fernandez
Shawn R. Klein
Michael M. Silverman



Barry R. Lewis, Jr.
Township Manager
973-535-7974

Glenn R. Turteltaub
Township Clerk
973-535-7904

Sharon L. Weiner
Township Attorney
973-535-7940

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Livingston Drinking Water Safety

A recent article published online on the *Livingston, NJ Patch*, entitled "Cancer-Linked Contaminants in Livingston Drinking Water: Report", has caused concern and raised questions among Livingston residents. The article is sourced by a report that was recently released by the independent non-profit "Environmental Working Group" (the "EWG").

In light of the alarming headline and incomplete, and in fact misleading, information presented in the article, the Township of Livingston felt that it was important to respond to the article to provide accurate information and reassure our residents as to the quality of their drinking water.

Initially, the EWG is a completely private, non-profit organization with no regulatory authority. Drinking water quality in our state is regulated by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency ("EPA") and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection ("NJDEP"). EWG's own website acknowledges that its "guidelines" are simply their internal assessment of contaminant levels, which are significantly stricter than the EPA and NJDEP regulations and maximum legal limits or which apply to contaminants that the EPA and NJDEP have not yet seen fit to regulate. The EWG is essentially a self-appointed expert group; second guessing and criticizing the findings and conclusions of the EPA and the NJDEP. The EWG conducts some of its own research, but largely relies on its review of selected research from other entities and draws its own conclusions therefrom. The EWG is a relatively small organization (it operates on an approximate \$12.5 million annual budget as compared to the EPA, \$8.1 billion annual budget, and NJDEP, \$636 million annual budget) and yet their "expertise" on environmental risk assessments is wide ranging, including drinking water, sunscreen, cosmetics, fruits and vegetables, pesticides, cookware, cell phones, cleaning products, food containers and countless other areas. Their conclusions, and often alarming warnings, have been the subject of frequent criticism from respected scientific and medical groups.

Turning specifically to the recent article on Livingston's drinking water, it should initially be noted that even under EWG's self-created, excessively restrictive "guidelines", Livingston's drinking water detection levels were well below the EWG "guidelines" for 6 of the 7 contaminants that were detected. In one case the detected level was less than 1/1000th of the EWG's own guideline level.

The only contaminant found in Livingston's drinking water that EWG reported as being above its "guideline" level, was Chromium 6 (Hexavalent). In that case, the level detected in Livingston water was 0.871 parts per billion (ppb), while EWG's "guideline" is 0.02 ppb; leading to the alarming claim that the Livingston level was "44 times above EWG's Health Guideline". The article correctly notes that there is "no legal limit" for Chromium 6 (Hexavalent). However, that statement is incomplete at best, and misleading and disingenuous at worst.

Specifically, while it is true that there is no separate legal limit for Chromium 6, the EPA has an established legal limit for total Chromium which is set at 100 ppb. The EPA explains why they regulate "total" chromium on their website, stating:

Is total chromium or chromium-6 in drinking water a health concern?

The current federal drinking water standard for total chromium is 0.1 [mg/l](#) or 100 ppb. Chromium-6 and chromium-3 are covered under the total chromium drinking water standard because these forms of chromium can convert back and forth in water and in the human body, depending on environmental conditions. Measuring just one form may not capture all of the chromium that is present. **In order to ensure that the greatest potential risk is addressed, EPA's regulation assumes that a measurement of total chromium is 100 percent chromium-6, the more toxic form.** If tap water from a public water system exceeds this federal standard, consumers will be notified. (Emphasis added) <https://www.epa.gov/dwstandardsregulations/chromium-drinking-water>

As can be seen, the EPA has set a legal limit for total chromium of 100 ppb which is based on the assumption that 100 percent of the total chromium measured is Chromium 6 (Hexavalent). Thus, the EPA has effectively set the limit for Chromium 6 at 100 pp. As noted, Livingston drinking water only had a Chromium 6 detection level of 0.871 ppb which is less than 1% of the EPA limit of 100 ppb. In other words, while the article claims that the Livingston Chromium 6 level is "44 times" the EWG's "guideline", the Livingston level is only 1/114th of the EPA limit.

Equally important, the EPA is continually evaluating all contaminants and chemicals and their impact on the safety of drinking water, which includes evaluating new scientific reports and studies. With respect to Chromium 6, the EPA is currently in the process of an ongoing review and determination of whether any new or changed limits should be adopted. Specifically, the EPA website provides the following:

"EPA is actively working on the development of an Integrated Risk Information System (IRIS) assessment, which will include a comprehensive evaluation of potential health effects associated with both inhalation and ingestion of hexavalent chromium. The 2008 study by the National Toxicology Program will be included in EPA's evaluation of hexavalent chromium toxicity, along with other peer-reviewed, published literature that has been released since then.

When the review is completed, EPA will consider this and other information to determine whether the drinking water standard for total chromium needs to be revised. For more information on the status of the IRIS assessment of hexavalent chromium, visit: https://cfpub.epa.gov/ncea/iris2/chemicalLanding.cfm?substance_nmbr=144."

Also noteworthy, the basis of the EWG “guideline” of .02 ppb is a California public health guideline which was not even adopted in California. Instead, after consideration of the recommendation, the State of California adopted a Chromium 6 (Hexavalent) limit of 10 ppb which, while 10 times lower than the EPA total chromium limit of 100 ppb, is five thousand (5,000) times higher than the EWG “guideline” of .02 ppb. Livingston’s detection level of 0.871 is only 8.7% of the lower California limit of 10 ppb, which, again, is ten times lower than the EPA and NJDEP limit of 100 ppb.

Jeannette Harduby, P.E., Livingston’s Township Engineer and Director of the Department of Public Works, which includes the Livingston Water Utility, wanted to assure residents of the quality of our drinking water and responded to the article by stating:

“Livingston continues to provide safe and reliable water to our residents. We stay on the forefront of new water treatments and upcoming state and federal regulations. In fact, we are currently undertaking a study for the treatment of 1,4-Dioxane, working with our consultants, Mott MacDonald, to ensure that when and if standards are adopted, Livingston will be ready to meet them.

EWG can be an alarmist group. The DEP and the EPA are constantly reviewing water standards to ensure public safety. EWG’s claim that these agencies are not willing to set new regulations is simply not true. By way of example, New maximum contaminant levels (MCL) for PFNA and 1,2,3,TCP were recently adopted on September 4, 2018. Livingston is positioned to meet or exceed these standards.”

In summary, the Township of Livingston wants to assure residents that our drinking water is safe. We are compliant with all applicable limits and regulations imposed by the EPA and the NJDEP who have regulatory authority over New Jersey public water systems. We are committed to constantly improving our system, staying abreast of and complying with all new regulations and industry standards and will continue to deliver safe and potable water to our residents.