CHLORAMINE? WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Richard Winters | Circuit Rider I

Chloramine (often called Monochloramine) is a combination of chlorine and ammonia. Many municipal water systems are switching from simple chlorine to this compound to help them stay in compliance with the Disinfection Byproducts Rule. To comply, water utilities have to reduce their disinfection byproducts. The EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) believes that these byproducts "may pose health risks". It has been said that chloramine use will decrease the amount of disinfection byproducts as compared to using just chlorine by its self. According to information I found on the Blue Earth Labs website: www.blueearthlabs.com, this may not be the best choice to make. They make a bold statement that "Chloramine should not be added to water." They go on to list 5 reasons why it has no place in our drinking water:

1. Chloramine is an ineffective disinfectant. According to Hach, a global company in water quality testing, chloramine is 25 times less effective than chlorine in disinfection. This is important because, if dosing and mixing are not precise, utilities effectively expose everyone in the system to raw water. In fact, chloramine is so ineffective that utilities that use them are required to at least annually go back to just chlorine to clean out the bacteria that has become accustomed to ammonia.

2. Ammonia is a food source for bacteria, so when the chloramine breaks down, the ammonia actually feeds the bacteria it is supposed to stop. Further, a byproduct of this is nitrification. Nitrogen is released into the water that causes more growth of bacteria. Nitrates can reduce hemoglobin in a newborn baby's blood resulting in blue baby syndrome.

3. In a study conducted by the University of Illinois Champaign-Urbana shows that genetic damage occurs when exposed to chloramines. This is consistent with the fact any chloramine water must have chloramine removed before use in fish tanks and kidney dialysis. Further, chloramine is five times more damaging to respiratory illnesses in hospitals where routine use of chloramine was used to disinfect.

4. Chloramine is very corrosive, particularly with lead and copper. In Washington D.C., chloramines were the cause of lead leeching into the water and causing learning disabilities in children under five years old. They settled the lawsuit for $250 million.

5. The purpose of chloramine is only to trick the system so the utility can pass current regulatory standards. It is NOT to disinfect, it is to reduce the amount of disinfection byproducts by averting the chlorine from reacting with organics (the cause of disinfection byproducts) and thereby manage the result. More bluntly, Chloramine is, as described by one person, "neutered chlorine". Worse is that it generates NDMA, or nitrosamines, a disinfection byproduct 10,000 times more carcinogenic than anything it purports to displace. For more information on health effects of chloramine, visit: http://www.chloramine.org/chloraminefacts.htm.

As previously stated, the above 5 statements about chloramines was taken directly from the Blue Earth Labs website and in no way reflect New York Rural Water Association's or my own personal views on the matter. I just think everyone should take a look at all available information on any matter that directly affects their health and their families. If anyone can counter these statements with arguments that support the use of chloramines, please do and I will post them on our website. This was not meant to start a war on the use of chloramines, but I have to admit that it brought to light for me a lot of information about chloramine issues that I was unaware of. Have a safe winter season.