Judy
Health
RYI
File

[redacted]

One Step Ahead

USEPA recommends MTBE levels of 20–40 µg/L

Water suppliers should keep levels of methyl tertiary butyl ether (MTBE) in the range of 20–40 µg/L or lower to prevent taste and odor problems and protect against potential health effects, according to a new US Environmental Protection Agency advisory.

Finalized in December in response to requests for guidance on the emerging contaminant from USEPA regions and state drinking water officials, the advisory states that the recommended (and nonenforceable) range "will likely avert unpleasant taste and odor effects" and is "about 20,000 to 100,000 (or more) times lower than the range of exposure levels in which cancer or noncancer effects were observed in rodent tests."

Copies of the advisory and a companion fact sheet can be downloaded from the Internet at <www.epa.gov/OST> or obtained by calling (800) 490-9198.

Radium standards

Water systems that still exceed the 21-year-old standard of 5 pCi/L for combined radium 226 and 228 should prepare for "the most probable reality" that the standard will stay the same under the renewed rule-making effort governed by 1996 Safe Drinking Water Act amendments, according to USEPA. Agency officials said during a December 11 stakeholder meeting that an SDWA provision mandating that revised standards "maintain or provide for greater protection" all but precludes a less stringent radium standard, even if a looser limit "would present the same risk as intended" by the current one.

Noting agency interest in expediting the rule-making process to improve health protection and end the uncertainty of a rule in limbo since 1991, USEPA said it interprets the SDWA to be "technology-driven toward the maximum contaminant level goal, not risk driven to an upper limit," and the new "hold the line" provi-