DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Centers for Disease Control
and Prevention

January 15, 2014

Secretary Karen Bowling
Office of the Secretary
West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources
One Davis Square, Suite 100, East
Charleston, West Virginia 25301

Dear Secretary Bowling:

I am writing to provide additional background information on development of a drinking water screening value for the areas of West Virginia impacted by the Elk River MCHM spill. CDC/ATSDR has been pleased to work in close collaboration with the State and various Federal agencies during this response to provide technical assistance on water sampling activities, development of the screening value and public health guidance.

As you know, there are few studies on this specialized chemical. Like many studies done for medical, chemical safety and consumer applications, the only available studies looked at the effects of exposure on animals. Therefore, scientists used the available information about 4-methylcyclohexanemethanol MCHM to calculate how much MCHM a person could likely ingest without resulting in adverse health effects. These calculations use safety factors to take into account the differences between animals and people, and to consider possible effects on special populations. An additional safety factor was applied to account for the limited availability of data. Based on these safety factors and the available research studies, scientists recommended a screening level of 1 part per million (1 ppm) of MCHM in drinking water.

Since making the initial calculations, scientists have obtained additional animal studies about MCHM. These are currently being reviewed. At this time, the scientists continue to recommend 1 ppm as a protective level to prevent adverse health effects. However, due to limited availability of data, and out of an abundance of caution, you may wish to consider an alternative drinking water source for pregnant women until the chemical is at non-detectable levels in the water distribution system.

Scientists from multiple federal agencies are summarizing the currently available MCHM studies. This summary will be posted in the Hazardous Substances Data Bank (HSDB) as soon as it is complete. HSDB is an online, public resource provided by the National Library of Medicine. (http://www.nlm.nih.gov/pubs/factsheets/hsdbfs.html)

We will continue to work closely with your staff to review daily water sampling data. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or if we can provide any further assistance.

Sincerely,

Thomas Frieden, MD, MPH
Director