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Contact: Kirsten Stade (240) 247-0296

## **FIG LEAVES NO COVER FOR DRINKING WATER RADIATION ROLLBACK**

### **Final Approval for Radical Radiation Rise in Water Supplies after Nuclear Release**

Washington, DC — In a not so lovely parting gift, the Obama administration today formally adopted a policy of allowing public exposure to radioactivity following a nuclear release at levels many times the maximum limits of the Safe Drinking Water Act. Last-minute modifications ladled in by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to address public health concerns afford scant comfort, according to Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility (PEER).

The “Protective Action Guide (PAG) for Drinking Water after a Radiological Incident” was finalized today by its publication in the Federal Register. This policy lets the public consume water containing radiation at levels hundreds and thousands of times what is permitted for the more than 100 chemical elements that can emit radiation (radionuclides) under the Safe Drinking Water Act.

“Since this policy authorizes leaving people in contaminated zones and not providing them bottled or other potable drinking water for long periods, it should be called a ‘Protective Inaction Guide,’” stated Jeff Ruch, Executive Director of PEER which had to sue EPA to force release of information specifying what levels of which radionuclides EPA would permit public exposure to. “Under this policy, affected Americans would be guinea pigs in an untimed radiation experiment.”

In its final action, the EPA claims to have tightened the policy with respect to duration of public exposure, the nature of the triggering event and protections for infants and nursing mothers. PEER disputes the accuracy and efficacy of these supposed mitigations for the following reasons:

- **Duration.** These rollbacks cover the “intermediate period” after the radiation release has been brought under control (not necessarily stopped but no longer growing). EPA now contends that this period may last for “week to months but not longer than a year.” However, the PAG itself states that the early, intermediate and late “phases cannot be represented by precise periods of time” and suggests their duration be viewed as “in

terms of activities, rather than time spans.” Nor does EPA specify what happens if this intermediate period extends beyond a year;

- Trigger. EPA now says application of the PAG is limited to “nationally significant radiological contamination incidents” but does not define the term. The PAG itself states that it covers “a wide range of incidents,” not just reactor accidents but also spills. By contrast, the EPA website FAQ posting says the PAG applies in “any radiological emergency”; and
- Sensitive Populations. The PAG allows 500 millirems (mrem) of radiation exposure for the general population but only 100 mrem for the most sensitive populations (e.g., infants, children, pregnant women and nursing women). But EPA never explains how non-nursing children will get only one-fifth the radiation their parents receive in situations lacking clean drinking water.

“EPA’s qualifications tacitly concede the dangers to public health but do little to solve them,” added Ruch, noting that PEER is considering a lawsuit to nullify the PAG. “Among other legal vulnerabilities, this policy flies in the face of the anti-backsliding requirements of the Safe Drinking Water Act.”

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[View the Federal Register notice](#)

[Examine redline showing recent EPA rewrites](#)

[See EPA’s public relations motivation for the PAG](#)

[Look at the full Drinking Water PAG](#)

[Read the non-explanatory EPA blog posting](#)