



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

EPA-SAB-EHC-89-031

July 17, 1989

OFFICE OF
THE ADMINISTRATOR

Honorable William K. Reilly
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Subject: Science Advisory Board's review of the THALLIUM health
criteria document

Dear Mr. Reilly:

The Metals Subcommittee of the Science Advisory Board's Environmental Health Committee has completed its review of the Drinking Water Health Criteria Document for Thallium, dated May, 1988. The review was conducted December 8, 1988 at the One Washington Circle Hotel in Washington, D.C. Participants in the review are listed in Attachment 1. The Subcommittee addressed two issues:

Is the use of the Stoltz et al (1986) study, with an uncertainty factor (UF) of 3000, an appropriate basis for setting a Drinking Water Equivalent Level (DWEL)?

If not, should the UF be revised to derive a DWEL for thallium?

The DWEL proposed by the Office of Drinking Water (ODW) is based on the Stoltz study noted above, which reported no toxicity (but some changes in clinical chemistry--Ca, Na, SGOT, and LHD levels) at dosages of 0.2 mg/kg/day. This level was identified as the NOAEL (No Observed Adverse Effects Level). After inclusion of an uncertainty factor of 3000 (to account for the use of an animal study of less than life-time duration and for inadequate testing of certain endpoints), and the "standard" assumptions for body weight, consumption of drinking water, and routes of exposure, a DWEL of 0.002 mg/l was derived for thallium.

The Subcommittee believes that additional analysis of the data underlying the document is required in order to realize an acceptable DWEL proposal. As recognized by the ODW, the choice of a UF of 3000 is essentially arbitrary, with no articulated analytical or theoretical rationale other than "standard practice." At least part of the ambiguity results from EPA's continuing reliance on data from single dose levels, such as the NOAEL and

the Lowest Observed Adverse Effect Level (LOAEL) to calculate Reference Doses and associated standards. Several of the studies cited, however, especially those from which effects levels were derived, lend themselves to a more meaningful dose-response (effect) analysis. Dose-response analysis could possibly also extract data from otherwise unusable data. For example, a study cited in the document (Gibson and Becker, 1970) is dismissed because "The NOAEL for developmental toxicity could not be established due to the presence of effects at all levels treated..." With suitable analysis, this study could yield valuable data. The Subcommittee urges EPA to study further its approach to uncertainty factors and their use in developing DWELs and reference doses.

The thallium document itself is a fairly complete compilation of the pertinent literature. Like other documents of this type, however, it serves primarily as an annotated bibliography rather than a critical review. In most cases, it provides enough details about individual studies for a reviewer to make critical judgments. The absence of a critical stance within the document itself, however, often leads to confusion because studies of widely divergent quality are seemingly accorded equivalent weight. Individual chapter summaries reflect this approach--they tend to be condensed versions of the chapter itself rather than a coherent integration of findings and conclusions. The Subcommittee recommends that future documents adopt a more evaluative, analytic posture and clarify the relative weight/emphasis accorded to particular studies. A more useful document should result.

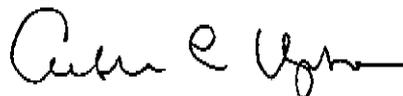
More detailed comments on specific editorial and technical issues have been forwarded to the program office.

The Subcommittee appreciates the opportunity to present our views on the thallium health criteria document. We look forward to the Agency's response to our report.

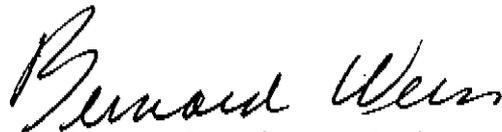
Enclosure



Dr. Raymond Loehr, Chairman
Science Advisory Board



Dr. Arthur Upton, Chairman
Environmental Health Committee



Dr. Bernard Weiss, Chairman
Metals Subcommittee

ABSTRACT

This report presents the conclusions and recommendations of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Science Advisory Board summarizing a review of the Drinking Water Health Criteria Document for Thallium. The Board's major conclusion is that the proposed Drinking Water Equivalent Level (DWEL) of 0.002 mg/l of thallium, based on the 1986 Stoltz et al study, is not supportable because of insufficient analysis of the available data. The Board also recommended that the Agency attempt to extend its application of dose-response analysis to extract more information from the available data.

Key Words: Thallium; DWEL; drinking water,

U.S Environmental Protection Agency
Science Advisory Board
Environmental Health Committee
Metals Subcommittee

CHARIMAN

Dr. Bernard Weiss
Division of Toxicology
P.O. Box RBB
University of Rochester
School of Medicine
Rochester, NY 14642

VICE-CHAIRMAN

Dr. Ronald Wyzga
Electric Power Research Institute
3412 Hillview Avenue
P.O. Box 1041
Palo Alto, California 94303

Dr. Thomas Clarkson
Division of Toxicology
University of Rochester
School of Medicine
Post Office Box RBB,
Rochester, New York 14642

Dr. Gary Diamond
Toxicology Center Director
Syracuse Research Corporation
Merrill Lane
Syracuse, New York 13210

Dr. Phil Enterline
Department of Biostatistics
Graduate School of Public Health
University of Pittsburg
130 Desoto Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15261

Dr. Marvin Kuschner
Professor of Pathology
Dept. of Pathology
School of Medicine
Health Science Center
Stony Brook, New York 11794

Enclosure (1)

Dr. Brooke T. Mossman
Department of Pathology
The University of Vermont
Medical Alumni Building
Burlington, Vermont 05405-0068

Dr. Guenter Oberdoerster
Radiation Biology and
Biophysics Division
University of Rochester
School of Medicine
400 Elmwood Avenue
Rochester, N.Y. 14642

Dr. Kenneth Reuhl (Neurotoxicology)
Dept. of Pharmacology and Toxicology
Neurotoxicology Laboratory
College of Pharmacy
Rutgers University
Busch Campus
Piscataway, NJ 08855-0789

Dr. F. William Sunderman
Department of Laboratory Medicine
University of Connecticut
Health Center, Room C 2021
Farmington, Connecticut 06032

Executive Secretary

Mr. Samuel Rondberg
Executive Secretary
Metals Subcommittee
Science Advisory Board (A-101F)
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, D.C. 20460

Staff Secretary

Mary L. Winston
Staff Secretary
Environmental Health Committee
Science Advisory Board (A-101F)
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Washington, D.C. 20460

SAB Staff Director

Donald G. Barnes
Director
Science Advisory Board
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460