

**TESTIMONY OF STEVE LEWIS, CITY MANAGER
CITY OF NORMAN, OKLAHOMA
BEFORE THE U.S. SENATE ENVIRONMENT AND PUBLIC WORKS COMMITTEE
February 2, 2011**

Madam Chairwoman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am Steve Lewis, City Manager of Norman Oklahoma and responsible to our citizens for the safety of their drinking water. The City of Norman first learned of the Environmental Working Group (EWG)'s reported levels of Chromium 6 in our water supply through the news media. Norman, Oklahoma was identified as having one of the highest levels of Chromium 6 of the 35 cities tested. In spite of our requests, the EWG has refused to share the sampling data details with us, so confirmation of their report has not been possible. What we do know is that a single water sample was used to undermine public confidence in the safety of our water supply.

Total chromium is regulated by the EPA as a primary drinking water contaminant with a maximum contaminant level (MCL) of 100 parts per billion (ppb). This level of protection was set by the EPA in 1992 based on the best available science. Two subsequent EPA reviews concluded that the total chromium MCL is still protective of public health and as precautionary as the current science dictates. We applaud EPA's continued diligence to regulatory rule making based on good science and look forward to the result of the current Chromium 6 scientific review to be finalized later this year.

In Norman, total chromium is tested in accordance with requirements of the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ) and the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Approximately 30% of our water supply is ground water, where chromium occurs naturally. Chromium testing results are reported annually to our customers in our Consumer Confidence Report (CCR); the latest CCR reported total chromium values for our ground water wells between 11 and 86 ppb, all of which are below the regulatory limit of 100 ppb. Seven new water wells have been tested for total chromium since issuance of the CCR and their levels range from "non-detect" to 80 ppb. The surface Water Treatment Plant, that treats Lake Thunderbird water, has total chromium levels of "non-detect". All of our potable water, whether groundwater or surface water, is 100% in compliance with all current EPA regulations.

Based on EPA's suggested recommendations, the City of Norman has begun comprehensive testing specifically for Chromium 6 at each of our wells as well as within the distribution system. With this additional information, Norman will be in a better position to address our customers concerns and to respond if a change in the chromium regulation is promulgated.

The residents of Norman may rest assured that the City of Norman is committed to providing water that is safe to drink for all members of our community. As previously noted, the EPA is currently evaluating new health effects data on Chromium 6 and that evaluation is expected to be complete in late 2011. Norman is prepared to vigorously respond in a way that protects public health and meets Federal and State of Oklahoma standards.

Consistent with our commitment to provide safe drinking water, the Mayor and I have appointed a Chromium 6 Working Group that will be constituted of senior city management and three members of the City Council. There will also be representatives on a technical advisory committee who bring expertise in chemistry and geology, public health, and water system engineering to work with this group as we continue to monitor the chromium public health issues.

But more is needed from our regulators, and this is my main point to you today. We are in a new age of communication and information. The EWG report was designed to alarm the American people as to the safety of their drinking water and caused them to question the ability of utilities like Norman to protect the public health of our customers; when, in fact, the public water supply system in Norman Oklahoma provides the safest and most economical drinking water option that good science and good public health policy would dictate.

We need more from our regulators than just reports on the technical details of rules and rule making. We need our regulatory bodies, especially EPA, to engage the American public in an open and honest discourse about the safety of their drinking water with the same media approach that our detractors use. EPA's December 2010, response to the EWG study was

helpful, but did not provide any specific guidance regarding how to respond to concerned customers. We need to be proactive, not reactive.

The safety of the American Public's drinking water is one of the most impressive success stories of the last 100 years. Protecting public health means more than acting on the good science that EPA develops and fosters. It means providing the confidence to our citizens and customers that their drinking water is the safest source of water available to them. To accomplish the complete mission of protection of the public health, our industry must be able to communicate our message more effectively than those who would have our customers think otherwise. America's drinking water is safe, reliable and economical. And we can all be proud of that fact.

Norman will continue to work closely with the ODEQ and the EPA to assure our drinking water is safe for human consumption. Norman continues to support research by the EPA, the Water Research Foundation (WRF), and other government and scientific organizations. I appreciate the opportunity to testify and demonstrate Norman's actions, and I am pleased to respond to any questions you may have.