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Review of EPA's Water Data Asked

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Washington — An environmental group petitioned the U.S. Court of Appeals here to review national interim drinking water standards made public last week by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

A spokesman for the group, the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF) said Wednesday the standards fail to regulate known and suspected cancer-causing substances in the nation's water supplies.

"We are dealing with a time bomb with a 25-year fuse," said Dr. Robert H. Harris, associate director of the EDF's toxic chemicals' program. He said Americans cannot afford to wait to see what will happen as they have done with cigarettes.

Many scientists attribute most of the recent rise in lung cancer to cigarette smoking, yet it took many years to achieve such measures of discouragement as the warning on cigarette packages and the ban on television advertising.

Harris said traces of known and suspected cancer-causing chemicals have been found in water samples from several major cities.

These substances include chloroform, vinyl chloride, carbon tetrachloride, asbestos and industrial chemicals called polychlorinated biphenyls.

Harris said federal regulatory agencies have done "virtually nothing" to protect the public from cancer-causing chemicals in water supplies.

In the petition the fund seeks to have the court of appeals order EPA to redraft its interim standards. These are to go into effect in June, 1977, and will apply to about 240,000 U.S. public water systems.

The petition charges the government agency with failure to require adequate monitoring of heavy metals in water supplies, failure to require water plants to adopt adequate control measures against viruses and with shortcomings in dealing with other contaminants including asbestos and pesticides.

Victor Kimm, head of EPA's water supply office, said the agency has not yet seen the petition. On the issue of cancer-causing chemicals, Kimm said the agency believes there is an urgent need for more information and that it is pursuing this information as rapidly as possible. He said the agency will analyze samples of water from 100 cities in assessing the changes in the standards.

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