

## Doctors Defend Use of Humans in Chemical Study

The Loma Linda University Medical Center researchers held a news conference Tuesday to respond to media reports raising concerns about people being given doses of perchlorate, a chemical used in rocket fuel that has contaminated ground water in parts of Southern California.

Anthony Firek, the study's principal investigator, said the dosages are also lower than those given in a study published earlier this year by Harvard University. Nine men received 10 milligrams of perchlorate daily in that study.

The hospital's institutional review board, which oversees clinical trials, concluded that participants would face minimal risk. Researchers said the perchlorate doses being given in the study are about 100 times lower than those given to people who are prescribed perchlorate for thyroid illnesses. Loma Linda researchers are giving participants doses ranging from a half-milligram to three milligrams. Half of the participants get placebos.

But the daily doses in the Loma Linda study are still up to 83 times higher than drinking-water limits for perchlorate recommended by California's Department of Health Services.

So far, just eight people have enrolled in the study, which began in early October. Researchers hope to eventually enroll 100 people who each will be paid \$1,000 for seven months of participation.

Participants are informed of the risks of the research, which include bone marrow suppression, lessening of white and red blood cell counts and thyroid problems.

Lockheed Martin - which faces hundreds of lawsuits accusing it of creating perchlorate pollution and threatening the health of San Bernardino and Riverside counties' residents - is paying for the study. The aerospace company's officials have said the study will help determine the health risk of perchlorate. The idea for the study came from medical researchers, not Lockheed, researchers said.

Firek said the study is being conducted to determine how best to diagnose and treat any illnesses caused by perchlorate in drinking water.

Perchlorate has been used as a rocket-fuel oxidizer since the 1940s, and is thought to have contaminated water supplies in parts of Riverside and San Bernardino counties, as well as the San Gabriel Valley east of Los Angeles.

In large doses, it can slow down the thyroid, which produces the hormone that controls infants' brain development and growth in older children. In adults, the thyroid regulates such things as temperature and blood cholesterol. Some people with thyroid illnesses are prescribed perchlorate to help treat their conditions.