



**THE EAST FORK** of the San Gabriel River. Officials say 90% of Los Angeles County residents use drinking water that will be protected under the Clean Water Rule. Developers and farm groups are opposed.

# Clean Water Act expanded

## The EPA completes regulations to protect all active tributaries

By Katie Shepherd

The Obama administration finalized new regulations Wednesday that it says will protect streams, rivers and wetlands that provide drinking water to more than 117 million Americans.

The Clean Water Rule, drafted by the Environmental Protection Agency and the Army Corps of Engineers, extends the Clean Water Act's protections to all tributaries with signs of flowing water. These streams and wetlands can have a crucial effect on the health of downstream waters, agency officials say. For "drinking water to be clean, the streams and wetlands that feed them need to be clean too," EPA Administrator Gina McCarthy said in a statement.

Environmental groups

applauded the new regulations, which have been opposed by farm groups, land developers and others who warned they would extend federal regulations onto inland wetlands and ponds that go well beyond the traditional scope of federal oversight.

The Sierra Club backed the new rule. "We think this is an easy decision for anyone who is not in the pocket of big polluters," Executive Director Michael Brune said in a statement.

The American Farm Bureau, in a letter to Congress, said the new regulations created confusion and risk by providing too much authority to regulate a variety of areas where rainwater collects.

Republicans in Congress also have expressed concerns. The administration said the move was designed

to clarify ambiguities in the Clean Water Act. The uncertainty stems from a 2006 Supreme Court decision that concluded the Clean Water Act protects against illegal discharges into streams and wetlands that connect to navigable waters, but that did not define what qualified as a connection.

Before the new rule, up to 60% of American streams and millions of acres of wetlands were potentially overlooked by the Clean Water Act, EPA officials say. One in three Americans and more than 90% of Los Angeles County residents use drinking water affected by these sources that lacked clear protection from pollution before the rule, according to the agency.

The new regulations are expected to have a significant effect in California. They will provide full protection for the first time, for example, to a network of vernal pools that lie along much of the coast. While the Los Angeles River fell under the jurisdiction of the Clean Water Act, its tributaries are now also covered.

The new rule as adopted appears to alleviate many of the concerns expressed by California water agencies that the regulations would impose overly broad restrictions over agricultural ditches, stormwater retention basins, recycled water centers and constructed wetlands. Most of those waterways, EPA officials said, are not covered in the final rule.

But Kari Fisher, an environmental attorney for the California Farm Bureau Federation, said the organization was studying the new rule to make sure.

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The team's study, published Tuesday in the journal BMJ, confirms past findings, said Susan Jick, an epidemiologist at the Boston University School of Public Health who wrote an editorial accompanying the report.

"The results provide compelling evidence that these newer oral contraceptives are associated with a higher risk of venous thromboembolism than older options," wrote Jick, who

# New birth control pills pose higher clot risk, study says

By Eryn Brown

Women who take newer types of birth control pills face a higher risk of developing blood clots than women who take older types, researchers said Tuesday, providing evidence that more modern contraceptives designed as safer options may in fact pose more risk than earlier formulations.

Poring over two medical databases to study more than 50,000 15- to 49-year-old women in Britain, University of Nottingham researcher Yana Vinogradova and colleagues found that women who took combined oral contraceptives that include versions of estrogen and progestin had a higher risk of developing venous thromboembolisms — dangerous blood clots — than women who didn't take the pill.

But when team members broke out the data by medication and controlled for other risk factors, they also discovered that certain versions of the birth control pill were associated with higher risk than others.

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"The results provide compelling evidence that these newer oral contraceptives are associated with a higher risk of venous thromboembolism than older options," wrote Jick, who

was not involved in the research but whose Boston Collaborative Drug Surveillance Program has conducted similar analyses in the past.

Around the world, Vinogradova and her coauthors wrote, close to 10% of women of childbearing age use oral contraceptives — a number that grows to 18% of women in developed countries. The risk of developing blood clots for such women, who are generally healthy, is low but real.

According to Jick, drug makers were attempting to create safer pills when they started using the newer synthetic hormones like drospirenone.

"There were all these reasons one would think they should have been safer," she said in an interview. "And yet they weren't."

Confirming the increased risk, however, has been difficult, Jick added, because different studies have been conducted in different ways — with some methodologies masking the medications' effects.

The new report in BMJ addressed some of the lingering contradictions by analyzing the data through a number of approaches.

For instance, Jick explained, the team broke out statistics for women who were prescribed anti-clotting medications and for women who didn't have other risk factors for clots: subsets that were more likely to represent true cases of contraceptive-related venous thromboembolism.

In such cases, the association between newer contraceptive use and clotting risk strengthened, providing further indication that the effects the team identified were real.

"People should know that the risk is there," Jick said.

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