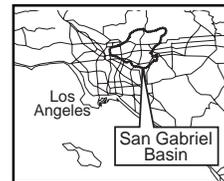




San Gabriel Valley Superfund Site: Whittier Narrows Operable Unit Proposed Plan



U.S. Environmental Protection Agency • Region 9 • San Francisco, Ca • October 1998

EPA Proposes Plan to Address Groundwater Contamination in the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit

Introduction

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is seeking public comments about this Proposed Plan for the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit of the San Gabriel Valley Superfund Site in Los Angeles County, California. In accordance with Section 117(a) of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA) of 1980, EPA is announcing the Proposed Plan to solicit public review and comment.

This Proposed Plan presents EPA's preferred alternative for addressing groundwater contamination in Whittier Narrows and another alternative considered. EPA encourages you to review and comment on the preferred alternative described in this Proposed Plan prior to the close of the public comment period (November 30, 1998). This Proposed Plan summarizes the more detailed information found in the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit Feasibility Study Addendum Report and other documents in the Administrative Record. These documents are available for review at the information repositories listed on page 9. EPA encourages the public to review these documents to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit and the associated Superfund activities.

A community meeting will be held on Thursday, November 19, 1998 to discuss the two alternatives presented in this plan and to take your comments (see

adjacent box for details). In addition to presenting your comments at the public meeting, you may also comment in writing during the public comment period from October 26 to November 30, 1998.

EPA's objective for the preferred remedy is to protect human health and the environment, by protecting the groundwater resource in Whittier Narrows and the Central Basin. EPA is proposing to extract, treat, and monitor contaminated groundwater in the shallow and intermediate zones in the general vicinity of the Whittier Narrows Dam to prevent further migration of groundwater contamination from the San Gabriel Basin, through Whittier Narrows, into the Central Basin.

As the lead agency for the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit, EPA has worked with the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (LARWQCB) and the California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) on this site. The LARWQCB concurs with EPA's preferred alternative. DTSC is currently reviewing EPA's proposal. EPA has also worked closely with local stakeholders in both the Central and San Gabriel Basins throughout the Remedial Investigation/Feasibility Study (RI/FS) process in the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit. After receiving comments from the public and local stakeholders, EPA, in consultation with DTSC and the LARWQCB, will select

COMMUNITY MEETING

**Proposed Plan for the Whittier
Narrows Operable Unit**

Thursday, November 19, 1998

7:00 to 9:00 p.m.

South El Monte High School

1001 N. Durfee Avenue

South El Monte

(626) 442-0218

(See map on last page for directions)

At this meeting, EPA representatives will present the two alternatives evaluated and describe EPA's preferred alternative. You will have the opportunity to ask questions, and give written and verbal comments on the two alternatives described in the Proposed Plan and other related documents. EPA encourages you to comment on the Proposed Plan and other site-related documents during the public comment period (October 26, to November 30, 1998). Verbal or written comments may be submitted at the community meeting. You may also submit comments by mail, fax or e-mail to:

Doug Frazer

Remedial Project Manager

U.S. EPA Region 9

75 Hawthorne Street (SFD-7-3)

San Francisco, CA 94105

Telephone: (415) 744-2259

Fax: (415) 744-2180

e-mail: frazer.doug@epa.gov

*Note: Comments sent by mail must be postmarked no later than November 30, 1998. Comments sent by phone, fax, or e-mail must be received no later than November 30, 1998.

Cont'd. on pg. 3

Site Background

Groundwater in the San Gabriel Valley is the primary drinking water source for more than one million people. Regional groundwater contamination by volatile organic compounds (VOCs) prompted EPA to place the San Gabriel Valley on the National Priorities List in 1984. This list identifies the highest priority hazardous waste sites in the United States for investigation and cleanup.

The Whittier Narrows Operable Unit is one of eight Operable Units within the San Gabriel Valley Superfund Site, located in eastern Los Angeles County, California (Figure 1). The term "Operable Unit" (OU) is used to define a discrete action that is an incremental step toward a comprehensive site remedy. Operable Units may address certain geographic areas, specific site problems, initial phases of a remedy, or a set of actions over time. In addition to the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit, EPA has identified seven other OUs at the San Gabriel Valley Superfund Site. These are the Alhambra OU, Baldwin Park OU, El Monte OU, Puente Valley OU, Richwood OU, South El Monte OU, and Suburban OU.

EPA designated the Whittier Narrows as an Operable Unit specifically to address groundwater contamination flowing out of the San Gabriel Basin, through Whittier Narrows, into the Montebello Forebay portion of the Central Basin. The Montebello Forebay area is the primary source of recharge for the Central Basin's drinking water aquifers. Groundwater contamination migrating from the San Gabriel Basin into this area could impact the water supply for millions of Central Basin water users.

The Whittier Narrows Operable Unit is located in the southern portion of the San Gabriel Basin and represents the primary discharge point for groundwater and surface water flow exiting the basin. Whittier Narrows is a 1.5-mile gap in the low-lying hills that separate the San Gabriel Basin and the Central Basin. The Whittier Narrows Operable Unit is bounded to the north by the South El Monte Operable Unit at the Pomona Freeway (Highway 60). South of Whittier Narrows lies the Montebello Forebay portion of the Central Basin. Groundwater flow in the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit is principally from northeast to southwest from the San Gabriel Basin into the Central Basin. There are shallow, intermediate, and deep drinking water and irrigation wells located within Whittier Narrows and immediately downgradient in the Central Basin. Most of the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit is undeveloped land dedicated to flood control and outdoor recreational uses. The Whittier Narrows Operable Unit is surrounded by densely populated residential, commercial and light industrial areas. Industrial activities within the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit are generally limited to the far eastern portion of the Narrows.

EPA began investigation activities in the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit in the late 1980s. The information collected during this investigation indicated that levels of contamination migrating through Whittier Narrows and into the Central Basin posed a minimal risk. In 1993, EPA issued a Record of Decision calling for continued groundwater monitoring in the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit, along with installation of additional monitoring wells. In recent years, the monitoring data generated from these wells has indicated increasing VOC concentrations in western Whittier Narrows groundwater. In 1997, in response to the rising concentrations, EPA initiated further investigations and an evaluation of alternatives to protect the area's groundwater resource. EPA used this evaluation to develop the preferred remedy described in this Proposed Plan.

VOCs are the primary groundwater contaminants found above state and federal drinking water standards in the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit. Tetrachloroethene (PCE) and Trichloroethene (TCE) have been detected most often in groundwater, although there are sporadic detections of other VOCs in excess of drinking water standards. Elevated VOC contamination primarily occurs in the western half of Whittier Narrows and mainly consists of PCE. The highest PCE concentrations are found in the shallow groundwater (up to 100 feet below ground surface), but exceedances of drinking water standards for both of PCE and TCE have been detected up to 400 feet below ground surface in western Whittier Narrows.

PCE concentrations just above drinking water standards have also been detected in isolated locations in the Montebello Forebay, downgradient of Whittier Narrows. Figures 2 and 3 show estimated 1998 VOC concentrations in the shallow and intermediate zones. The shallow and intermediate VOC contamination found in western Whittier Narrows is migrating into the Operable Unit from upgradient contaminant sources. EPA has not found any significant sources of contamination within the western portion of the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit. Remediation of the upgradient contaminant sources will occur as part of activities in other Operable Units in the San Gabriel Basin.

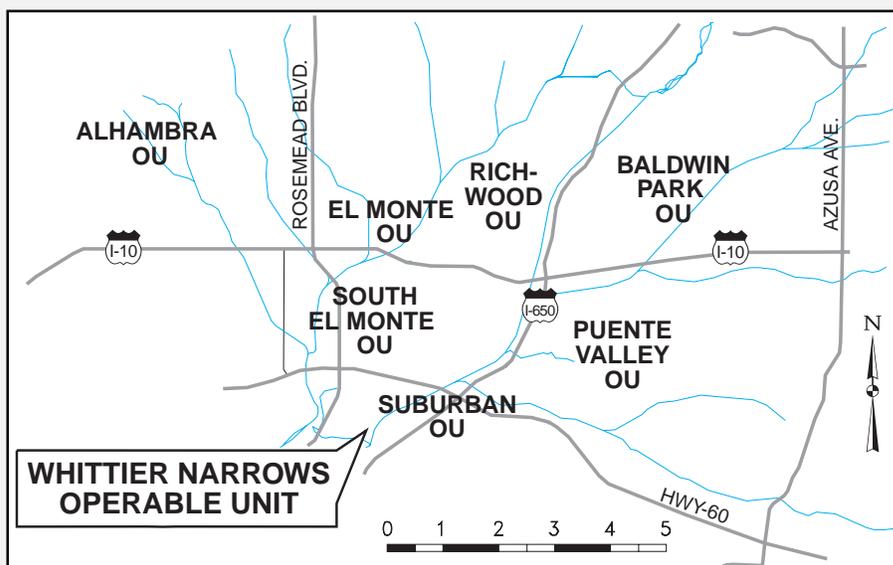


Figure 1: Location map of Whittier Narrows Operable Unit

one of the two alternatives presented in this Plan. EPA will then summarize the selected alternative in an Amended Record of Decision for the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit.

Public input on the cleanup alternatives, and on the information that supports the alternatives, is an important consideration in the remedy selection process. The public is encouraged to comment; your comments can influence EPA's decision. If warranted, the final cleanup remedy could differ from EPA's preferred alternative based on public comments or new information that EPA receives.

Summary of Site Risks

EPA originally completed a baseline risk assessment for the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit in 1992. The baseline risk assessment has since been updated with addenda in 1997 and again in 1998. The purpose of the risk assessment and addenda was to evaluate potential health effects from exposure to contaminated groundwater. The results of the risk assessment are one factor that EPA uses to determine whether remedial actions are necessary to protect human health or the environment. The risk assessment process includes: a) identifying types and amounts of chemicals present in the groundwater, b) characterizing the population potentially exposed to these contaminants, and c) evaluating the potential health effects that would result from exposure to the contaminated groundwater. For the risk assessment, EPA evaluated the risks to an individual potentially exposed to contaminated groundwater through residential use.

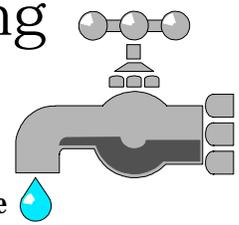
To evaluate cancer risks at a site, EPA uses a "risk management range" of one person in ten thousand (1×10^{-4}) to one person in one million (1×10^{-6}) potentially getting cancer from a lifetime of exposure to the contamination at the site. Risks greater than one in ten thousand (1×10^{-4}) generally require that remedial action be taken. If risks fall within the risk management range, EPA can evaluate the need for remedial action. Action may also be required if chemical-specific standards such as drinking water standards are exceeded.

The results of the most recent addendum to the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit baseline risk assessment indicate that potential exposure through domestic use to the most highly-contaminated shallow groundwater in Whittier Narrows would result in a total estimated lifetime cancer risk exceeding one in ten thousand (1×10^{-4}). The estimated cancer risk for other portions of the shallow zone and for the intermediate zone falls within the one in one million (1×10^{-6}) to one in ten thousand (1×10^{-4}) range. The overall risk for non-cancer health effects posed by contaminants in Whittier Narrows groundwater was found to be well below the level of concern.

The existence of an elevated potential future cancer risk supports EPA's decision to take action in the Whittier

Narrows Operable Unit. Actual or threatened releases of hazardous substances from the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit, if not addressed by the preferred alternative, may present a current or potential threat to public health, welfare, or the environment.

Is my drinking water safe?



Yes! Although groundwater contamination has occurred, drinking water extracted from the Whittier Narrows and Central Basin OU is treated by the water purveyors to meet all State and Federal drinking water standards. Further, there are currently no drinking water supply wells that draw water from the shallow, highly contaminated zones.

Remediation Objectives

EPA's Remedial Action Objective for the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit is to protect groundwater resources in Whittier Narrows and the Montebello Forebay portion of the Central Basin from VOC contamination emanating from the San Gabriel Valley. To the extent technically and economically feasible, EPA intends to control VOC migration in the San Gabriel Valley so that groundwater extracted from Whittier Narrows and Montebello Forebay production wells will not exceed drinking water standards.

Groundwater contaminated with PCE at levels just above the drinking water standard has been detected in monitoring wells just south of Whittier Narrows Dam in the Central Basin. EPA intends to implement a remedy that will prevent further migration of contamination above drinking water standards into the Central Basin.

This Remedial Action Objective reflects EPA's regulatory goal of restoring usable groundwater to its beneficial uses wherever practicable, within a time frame that is reasonable, or, if restoration is deemed impracticable, to prevent further migration of the plume, prevent exposure to the contaminated groundwater, and evaluate further risk reduction (40 Code of Federal Regulations Section 300.430[a][1][iii][F]).

To meet the Remedial Action Objective, migration control will be required in the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit as long as groundwater VOC concentrations moving through the Whittier Narrows exceed state or federal drinking water standards. The Remedial Action

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Figure 2: Shallow VOC Contamination

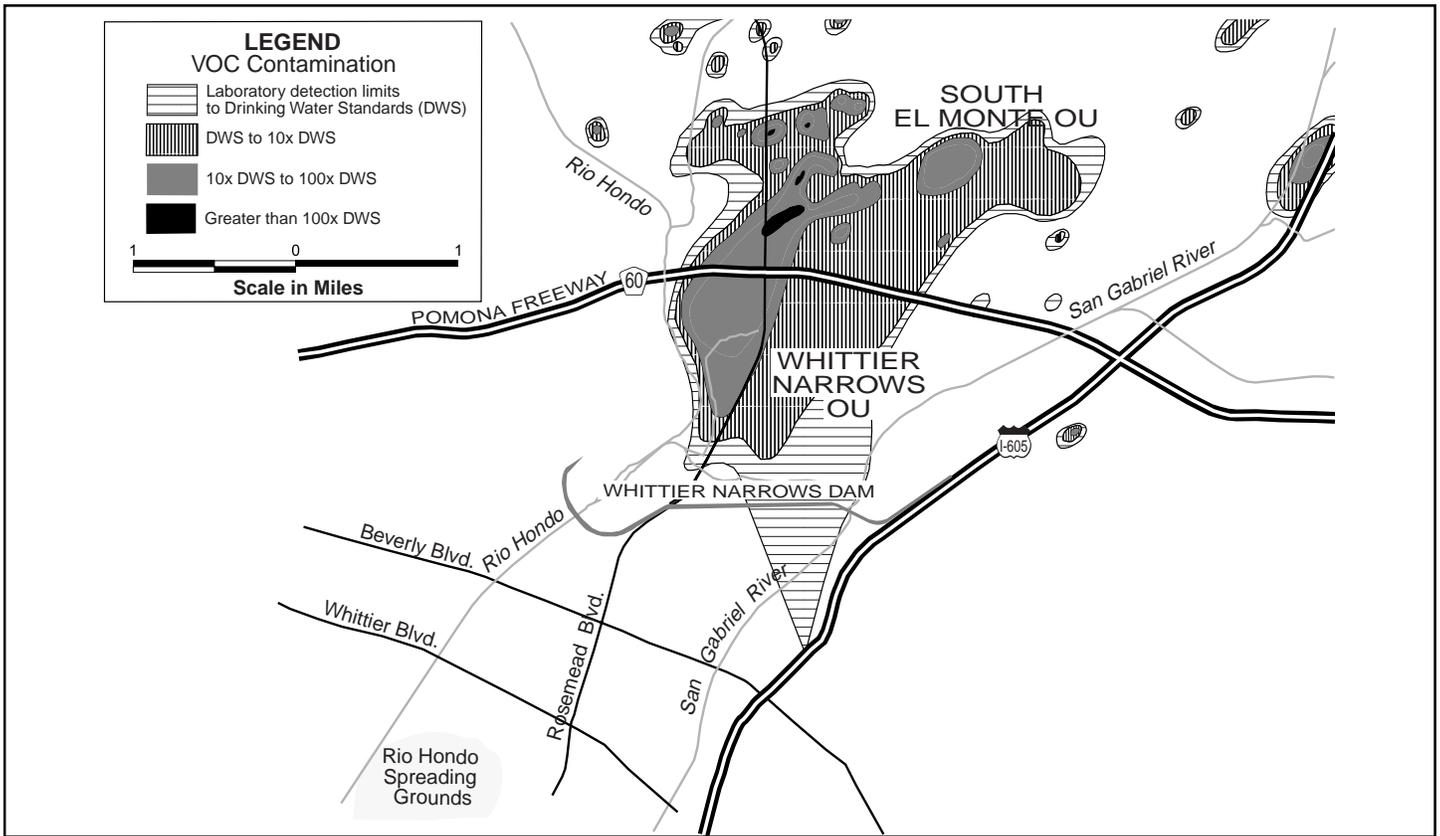
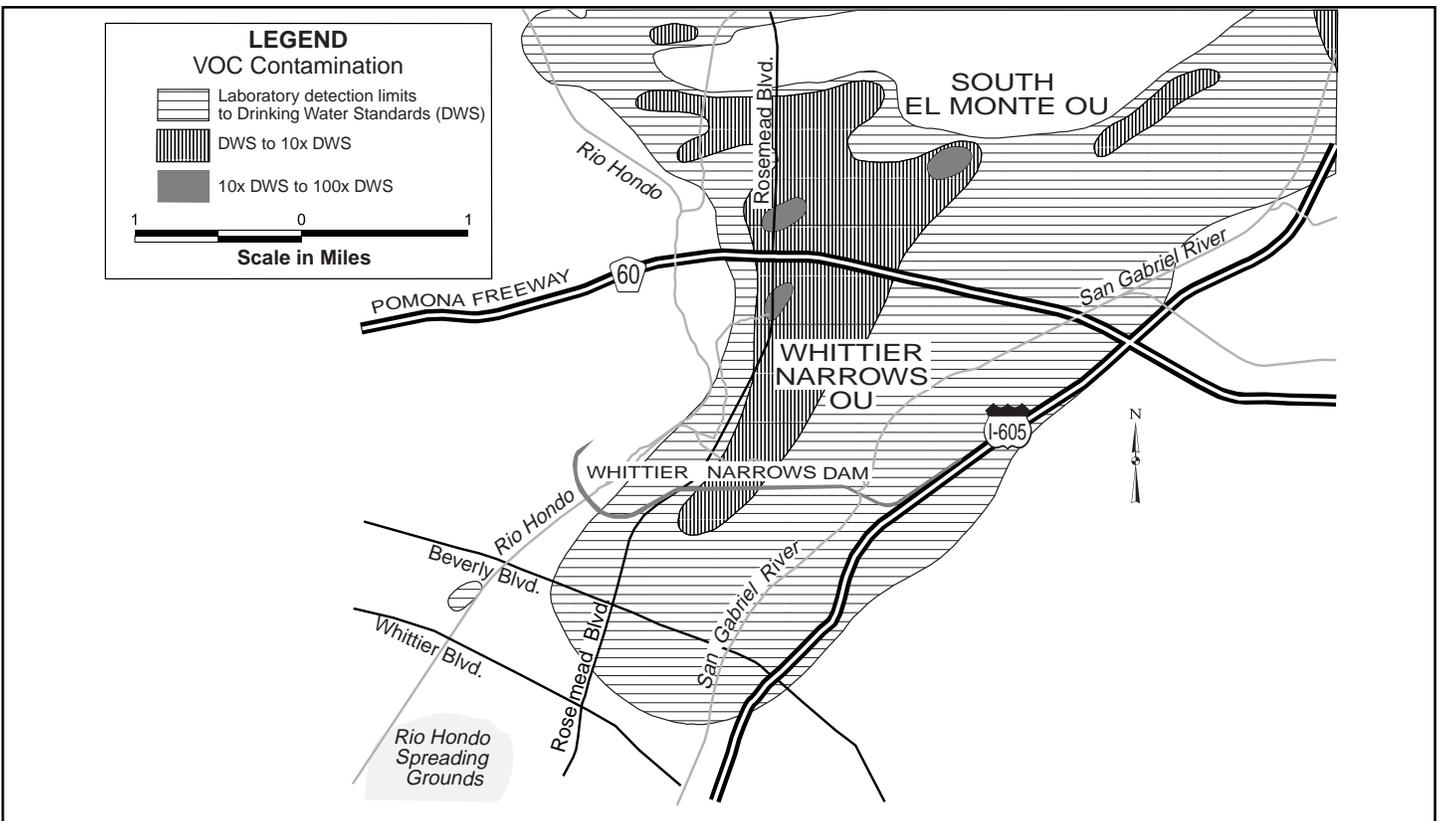


Figure 3: Intermediate VOC Contamination



Objective does not include a specific time frame for restoration of the aquifer because the Whittier Narrows remedial action does not address the sources of contamination, which are located in upgradient areas. Remediation in upgradient Operable Units will determine the length of time that an action in Whittier Narrows will need to operate.

Summary of Cleanup Alternatives

EPA is considering two alternatives: Alternative 1, “No-Additional-Action” and Alternative 2, “Groundwater Containment near Whittier Narrows Dam”. EPA typically considers several alternatives other than the No-Action-Alternative. In this case, only one active alternative was considered that would meet the Remedial Action Objective. This alternative is to extract and treat groundwater that exceeds drinking water standards and to conduct this extraction near Whittier Narrows Dam. Groundwater contamination containment options other than extraction were not considered because the existence of significant contamination to depths of 400 feet precludes other technologies.

EPA considers the area near the dam as the only suitable location for extraction because the much of the groundwater north of Whittier Narrows Dam is contaminated and the groundwater south of the dam has remained relatively clean. If EPA located groundwater extraction too far north of the dam, contamination present south of the extraction wells would eventually move into the Central Basin. On the other hand, locating the extraction too far south of the dam, beyond the current extent of contamination, would allow the contamination to spread over a much larger area, including portions of the Central Basin. By locating the extraction near the dam, EPA can best control contaminant migration, reduce risks from potential exposure to the contaminated groundwater, and protect the area’s groundwater resource.

The two alternatives are evaluated against eight of the nine specific criteria established by the National Contingency Plan (see Figure 4). Evaluation of the community acceptance criterion will be conducted based on comments received during the public comment period.

Alternative 1 - No Additional Action

- Present Worth Cost Estimate: \$2.6 Million
- Annual Operation and Maintenance (“O&M”) Cost Estimate: \$170,000

EPA is required to consider a no action alternative and to evaluate the risk to the public if no action were taken. The no action alternative serves as a basis for comparison with the other remedial alternative under consideration. In this

alternative, no additional remedial actions would be taken to control migration of contaminants in the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit. This alternative is titled “No-Additional-Action”, rather than “No Action”, because it would include ongoing groundwater monitoring in accordance with the current Record of Decision, but would not include groundwater containment or treatment. The only costs associated with this alternative are for long-term groundwater monitoring. While it is unclear how long groundwater monitoring would be needed, for cost estimating purposes, EPA assumed monitoring would be needed for the next 30 years. The No-Additional-Action alternative does not meet the Remedial Action Objective for Whittier Narrows, does not comply with federal and state environmental statutes, and provides the least overall protection of human health and the environment.

EPA’s Preferred Alternative

Alternative 2 - Groundwater Containment near Whittier Narrows Dam

- Present Worth Cost Estimate: \$16.4 to \$19.7 Million
- Capital Cost Estimate: \$6.6 to \$9.7 Million
- Annual O&M Cost Estimate: \$610,000

EPA’s preferred alternative incorporates extraction of contaminated water in the shallow and intermediate groundwater zones in the vicinity of Whittier Narrows Dam to provide containment of contaminated water migrating through Whittier Narrows. The extracted water will be treated and discharged. This alternative also includes a continued groundwater monitoring program in the Whittier Narrows area to ensure that the remedy is meeting the Remedial Action Objective.

EPA intends for the remedy to contain groundwater flow only in those portions of the aquifer where VOC concentrations exceed drinking water standards. The remedy will also be designed to minimize the potential impact of contamination on production wells near Whittier Narrows Dam. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, the size of the contaminated areas varies between the shallow and the intermediate zone. To facilitate cost-effective operations, the remedy will be designed with separate shallow and intermediate extraction wells, potentially in different locations, to allow for focused containment of only the contaminated portions of each depth interval. To develop cost estimates, specific extraction, treatment, and discharge systems were assumed. However, the selected remedy will incorporate an approach that provides flexibility during implementation of the remedial action.

The actual locations of the wells and magnitude of extraction

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SELECTING A REMEDY

Figure 4: The EPA uses nine criteria to evaluate alternatives for addressing contamination at a hazardous waste site.



will be determined during remedial design based on further understanding of the extent of groundwater contamination and water end-use and water rights considerations. EPA will evaluate a variety of implementation scenarios during remedial design, then select the most cost-effective approach that meets the Remedial Action Objective.

Once the extracted groundwater has been treated to remove VOCs, the treated water will meet or exceed drinking water standards and other ARARs for all constituents. The preferred alternative assumes that the treatment system would consist of air stripping with carbon adsorption for VOCs in the off-gas. However, other common treatment technologies, such as liquid-phase carbon adsorption, are also available. A single treatment facility has been assumed for costing purposes. After determination of the final extraction locations, extraction rates, and the end-use for the treated water, EPA will evaluate whether it would be more cost-effective to have multiple treatment facilities.

If the necessary agreements can be reached, the treated water will be supplied to cities or water purveyors that provide drinking water to residents and businesses in the San Gabriel and/or Central Basins. These water purveyors would then reduce extraction from their production wells by an equivalent amount. This end-use option represents the greatest beneficial use for the treated water and can provide a supply of clean water to purveyors whose wells may be impacted or threatened by groundwater contamination. Alternatively, if necessary agreements cannot be reached with water purveyors and water management agencies, or if it appears to be more cost-effective, the treated water will be recharged to the aquifer. This would likely occur via recharge facilities along the San Gabriel River and Rio Hondo in the Montebello Forebay. The final end use will be selected during remedial design.

A range of estimated costs is presented above for the preferred alternative to encompass different potential extraction locations and different end-use scenarios. The estimated total cost of the alternative is based on an assumed 30-year project life. The actual length of time that the extraction will need to occur depends on how much contamination moves into the groundwater from upgradient sources and how quickly contaminants move through the aquifer.

Aggressive remedial actions in the upgradient South El Monte Operable Unit would likely result in lower treatment and operation costs for the Whittier Narrows remedy by: 1) reducing the amount of time the remedy would need to operate, 2) reducing VOC concentrations reaching the extraction wells, and, 3) reducing the size of the contaminated area requiring containment.

If EPA selects Alternative 2 in the Record of Decision, design of the remedy would begin immediately and take about a year to complete. Construction of extraction wells, pipelines and treatment facilities would begin shortly thereafter and be completed approximately a year later.

Evaluation of Alternatives

Based on EPA's evaluation of the two alternatives against eight of the nine criteria (see Table below), EPA prefers Alternative 2.

Alternative 1 - The No Additional Action Alternative

The No-Additional-Action Alternative allows continued expansion of the area where groundwater contamination exceeds drinking water standards. As a result it does not meet most of the eight criteria. In addition, it does not meet EPA's Remedial Action Objective for the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit. However, because Alternative 1 requires only groundwater monitoring, it costs much less than Alternative 2.

Alternative 2 - Groundwater Containment near Whittier Narrows Dam

Based on the information currently available, EPA believes that the preferred alternative, Alternative 2, best satisfies the requirements stated in the following eight evaluation criteria:

- **Overall Protectiveness of Human Health and the Environment**

Alternative 2 satisfies this criteria by requiring the removal of groundwater contamination above drinking water standards from the aquifer to ensure protection of drinking water production wells and the groundwater resource in the Central Basin and Whittier Narrows. Extracted water will be treated to meet drinking water standards before it is sent to water purveyors or recharged to the aquifer.

- **Compliance with Applicable or Relevant and Appropriate Requirements (ARARs)**

Alternative 2 meets all legally applicable or relevant and appropriate federal and state requirements, standards, criteria, and limitations.

- **Long-term Effectiveness and Permanence**

The preferred remedy is designed to contain all groundwater moving through Whittier Narrows exceeding drinking water standards and is designed to operate as long as is needed to accomplish this goal.

- **Reduction of Toxicity, Mobility or Volume Through Treatment**

Under Alternative 2, contaminated groundwater will be extracted and transported to a treatment facility. At the treatment facility contaminants present in the groundwater will be removed from the groundwater, collected in carbon vessels, and shipped to a processing facility for eventual destruction.

- **Short-term Effectiveness**

The remedy proposed in Alternative 2 will take approximately 2 years to implement. The process of constructing extraction wells, pipelines, and treatment facilities should be minimally disruptive to the public and environment.

- **Implementability**

The extraction and treatment technologies described in Alternative 2 are widely used and easily implementable. There are several feasible options for disposal of treated water including sale to local purveyors or recharge back into the aquifer.

- **Cost**

The cost of the preferred remedy is reasonable. The Central Basin aquifer immediately downgradient of Whittier Narrows serves as the primary source of drinking water for millions of residents. If no action were taken a significant number of water purveyors may eventually be required to install wellhead treatment facilities on individual wells.

- **State Acceptance**

The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board concurs with EPA's recommendation to implement Alternative 2. The California Department of Toxic Substance Control is reviewing EPA's Plan.

In summary, EPA expects the Alternative 2 to meet the statutory requirement in CERCLA section 121(b) to: 1) be protective of human health and the environment; 2) comply with state and federal ARARs; 3) be cost-effective; 4) utilize permanent solutions and alternative treatment technologies to the maximum extent practicable; and 5) satisfy the preference for treatment as a principal element.

Table 1: Comparison of Alternatives

EVALUATION CRITERIA	ALTERNATIVE 1: NO ADDITIONAL ACTION	epa's preference - ALTERNATIVE 2: groundwater containment
OVERALL PROTECTIVENESS	NOT PROTECTIVE	PROTECTIVE
COMPLIANCE WITH STATE AND FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS	DOES NOT COMPLY	COMPLIES
LONG-TERM EFFECTIVENESS	NOT EFFECTIVE	EFFECTIVE
IMPLEMENTABILITY	NOT APPLICABLE	FEASIBLE
SHORT-TERM EFFECTIVENESS	NOT APPLICABLE	EFFECTIVE
REDUCTION OF TOXICITY, MOBILITY OR VOLUME BY TREATMENT	NO REDUCTION	HAZARDOUS CONTAMINANTS REDUCED
PRESENT WORTH COST	\$2.6 million	\$16.4 to \$19.7 million
STATE AGENCY ACCEPTANCE	LARWQCB CONCURS WITH EPA'S PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE. DTSC IS REVIEWING THE PROPOSED PLAN.	
COMMUNITY ACCEPTANCE	Community Acceptance of the preferred alternative will be evaluated after the public comment period	

Information Repositories

Copies of the FS Addendum Report for the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit and other site-related technical documents for the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit of the San Gabriel Valley Superfund Site are available for review at the locations listed below. These documents are part of the Administrative Record for the Whittier Narrows Operable Unit.

U.S. EPA Superfund Records Center
95 Hawthorne Street, Suite 403S
San Francisco, CA 94105-3901
Telephone: (415) 536-2000; Fax: (415) 764-4963
Hours: Monday to Friday: 8:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Saturday & Sunday: Closed

West Covina Library
1601 West Covina Parkway
West Covina, CA 91790
Telephone: (626) 962-3541
Hours: Monday to Wednesday 1:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
Thursday to Saturday 10:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Sunday Closed

Rosemead Library
8800 Valley Boulevard
Rosemead, CA 91770
Telephone: (626) 573-5220
Hours: Sunday & Monday Closed
Tuesday & Wednesday 12:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.
Thursday 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.
Friday 12:00 p.m. - 5:00 p.m.
Saturday 11:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.

Mailing List Coupon



If you did not receive this fact sheet in the mail and would like to be included on the mailing list to receive future mailings about the San Gabriel Valley Superfund Site, please fill out the coupon below and return to:

Catherine McCracken, Community Involvement Specialist
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Region 9
75 Hawthorne Street (SFD-3)
San Francisco, CA 94105

PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION

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(*Optional items)

You may also provide the above information via e-mail to:
Mccracken.Catherine@epa.gov

I AM INTERESTED IN:

Whittier Narrows OU _____

El Monte OU _____

Suburban OU _____

Baldwin Park OU _____

Puente Valley OU _____

South El Monte OU _____

Alhambra OU _____

Richwood OU _____

All San Gabriel OUs _____



For Additional Information

For additional copies of this fact sheet or for other information on the Proposed Plan for the Whittiers Narrows OU of the San Gabriel Valley Superfund Site, please contact the following:

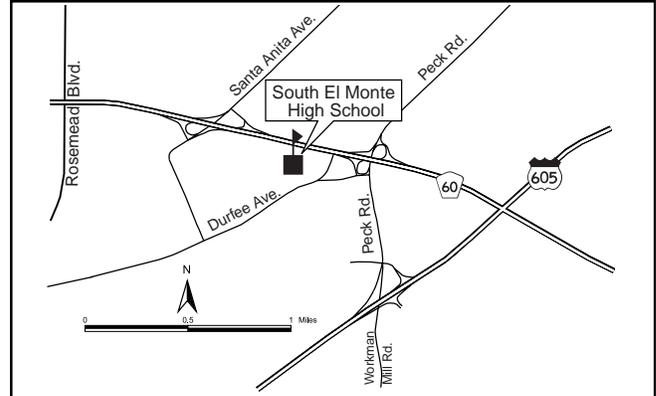
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...or you may leave a message on
EPA's Office of Community Involvement
toll-free line at **(800) 231-3075**
and your call will be returned.

South El Monte High School
1001 N. Durfee Avenue, South El Monte
(626) 442-0218



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