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San Gabriel Valley Superfund Sites Operable Unit Update

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY • REGION 9 • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA • APRIL 1998

INTRODUCTION

This fact sheet provides an update on the status of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) cleanup efforts at the San Gabriel Valley Superfund Sites in Los Angeles County, California. Multiple areas of contaminated groundwater in the San Gabriel Basin aquifer, a critical source of drinking water for Valley residents, prompted EPA to place four areas of the San Gabriel Valley on the National Priorities List (NPL) in 1984. The NPL identifies the highest priority hazardous waste sites in the United States for investigation and cleanup.

The Superfund Sites include areas of contamination which collectively cover approximately 30 square miles of the San Gabriel Valley's 170 square mile area. The San Gabriel Valley has been divided into five different project areas, or operable units (OUs): Baldwin Park, El Monte, South El Monte, Puente Valley, and Whittier Narrows (see map). Status updates on each of the operable units in the San Gabriel Valley are included in this fact sheet.

The San Gabriel Basin aquifer provides approximately 90% of the domestic water supply for the Valley's residents. Over 400 water supply wells are used in the basin to extract groundwater for industrial, business, agricultural, and domestic uses. Forty-five different suppliers of water operate in the basin and provide drinking water to more than one million people. **Currently, all drinking water provided by water purveyors meets all Federal and State drinking water standards.** Water utilities in the area have been able to continue to provide customers with clean water by shutting down wells in contaminated areas, installing "wellhead" treatment systems, blending water to meet drinking water standards, and by obtaining water from neighboring utilities.

EPA works with the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, the California Department of Toxic Substances Control, the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority, the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster, and local municipalities and agencies, to address issues related to groundwater contamination in the San Gabriel Valley. Beginning in about 1990, the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region, working under a Cooperative Agreement with EPA, began to identify the sources of the groundwater contamination. The Regional Board has inspected more than 3,000 commercial and industrial businesses in the San Gabriel Valley area, and required testing of soil, soil vapor, or groundwater at

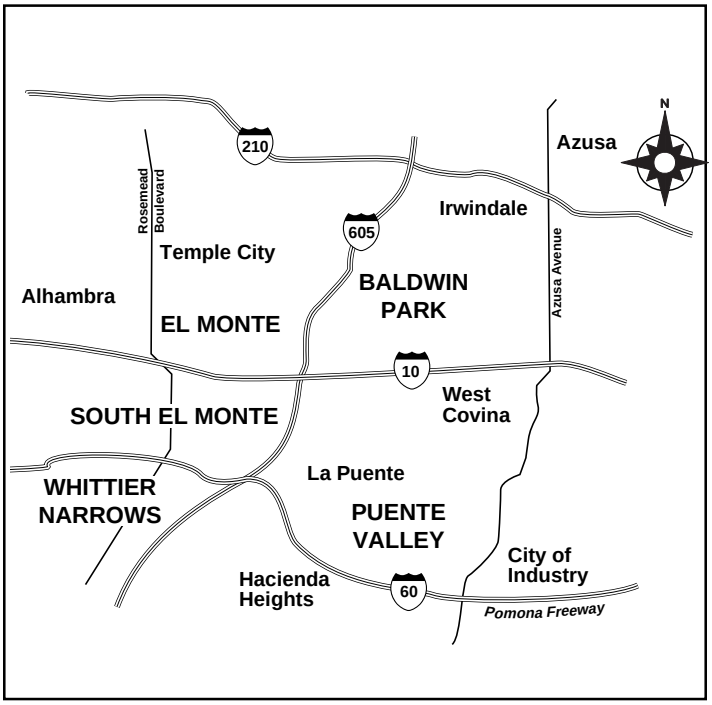

Figure 1: Location map of San Gabriel Valley Operable Units

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SITE BACKGROUND

The groundwater contamination in the San Gabriel Valley was first detected in 1979 in a groundwater well operated by the Valley County Water District. Following this discovery, the California Department of Health Services (DHS) initiated a well sampling program to assess the extent of contamination. By 1984, 59 wells were found to be contaminated with high levels of various volatile organic compounds (VOCs). VOCs are solvents that evaporate easily at room temperature, and are commonly used in dry cleaning, paint stripping, metal plating, and machinery degreasing. VOC contaminants in the San Gabriel Valley groundwater include tetrachloroethene (PCE), trichloroethene (TCE), and carbon tetrachloride.

Groundwater contamination in the San Gabriel Valley is a result of decades of handling and disposal practices which released VOCs into the soil and groundwater. EPA added four areas of the San Gabriel Valley to the National Priorities List in 1984, and began efforts to understand the nature and extent of the soil and groundwater contamination, identify sources of the contamination, develop a basin-wide plan to set cleanup priorities, and develop the institutional framework necessary to address the contamination.

facilities where the potential for contamination existed. Using the test results, historical State and local records, responses to information requests, and other investigative techniques, EPA determined that 162 parties in the San Gabriel Valley have significantly contributed to the groundwater contamination. Over 2,000 parties have been sent "no further action" letters to inform them that EPA does not believe that they have contributed to the groundwater contamination.

BALDWIN PARK OPERABLE UNIT

The Baldwin Park OU includes portions of the cities of Azusa, Irwindale, Baldwin Park, and West Covina. From 1990 to 1993, EPA completed an investigation of the nature and extent of groundwater contamination in the project area, and evaluation of cleanup options. The investigation included the compilation and analysis of sampling results from existing water supply wells, and installation and sampling of more than two dozen groundwater monitoring wells. VOCs are the primary contaminants found in the Baldwin Park OU above maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) allowed by Federal and State law. Perchlorate, a chemical used in solid-fuel rockets (including those used in the space shuttle), was detected in the Baldwin Park Operable Unit in June 1997.

EPA determined that 19 parties had significantly contributed to the groundwater contamination in the Baldwin Park OU. The 19 companies have been named as "Potentially Responsible Parties" (PRPs). Whenever possible, EPA requires PRPs to clean up the sites that they have contaminated.

In 1993 and 1994, EPA issued its proposed Baldwin Park cleanup plan and after review of all public comments, selected a remedy for the area. The selected remedy, now in the design stage, calls for one or more large groundwater pump and treat systems capable of extracting approximately 20,000 gallons per minute, or 27 million gallons per day, of contaminated groundwater.

From 1995 to early 1997, a majority of the PRPs, organized as the Baldwin Park Operable Unit Steering Committee, began the design process by installing and sampling a network of nine new groundwater monitoring wells in order to develop a detailed groundwater extraction plan. During this period, discussions with water agencies continued, a tentative treatment plant location was selected, and one of the participating water agencies (Three Valleys Municipal Water District) completed an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) to comply with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).

In May 1997, EPA sent "Special Notice" letters to the 19 PRPs to begin formal negotiations. If successful, the negotiations will result in a binding commitment by the PRPs to design, construct, and operate the groundwater cleanup facilities. The negotiations were originally expected to conclude in late 1997, but the discovery in June 1997 of perchlorate in groundwater at potentially unsafe levels has delayed the negotiations until late 1998 or early 1999. The originally planned treatment technology (air stripping) will not remove perchlorate from water. During this interim period, EPA and the Baldwin Park Operable Unit Steering Committee are carrying out studies of perchlorate-removal technologies, and developing final arrangements for distribution of the treated groundwater.

The Baldwin Park cleanup plan attempts to combine cleanup and regional water supply goals. EPA and Steering

Committee representatives are working with local agencies to reach agreements to implement a project that would satisfy EPA cleanup goals and help meet regional water supply goals by transporting treated groundwater to those in Southern California dependent on imported surface water from the Colorado River and Northern California. A joint project would cost more than a "cleanup only" project, but has the potential to use revenue from sales of treated groundwater and Federal and local subsidies to more than offset the increased costs. Efforts continue to resolve the many institutional obstacles to a joint clean up/ water supply project, including the need for modifications to the existing water rights agreement, agreements to fund the water supply components of the remedy, and agreements by participating water agencies to accept the treated water.

El Monte and South El Monte Operable Units

The El Monte OU includes portions of the cities of El Monte, Rosemead and Temple City. VOCs are the primary contaminants found in the El Monte OU groundwater above maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) allowed by Federal and State law. In March 1995, an agreement was reached between EPA and 15 PRPs. In the agreement, the PRPs committed to complete the regional investigation to determine the nature and extent of the groundwater contamination in the area. A final investigation report has been submitted to EPA, and a draft study of cleanup options is currently being reviewed by EPA. An "early action" project being developed for the El Monte OU consists of the installation and monitoring of new groundwater wells which will provide valuable information for the cleanup plan. EPA expects to propose a cleanup plan for the El Monte OU in September 1998.

The South El Monte OU includes portions of the cities of South El Monte, El Monte and Rosemead. VOCs are the primary contaminants found in the South El Monte OU groundwater above maximum contaminant levels (MCLs) allowed by Federal and State law. A single PRP, out of 50 PRPs, signed an agreement with EPA to conduct the regional investigation of the nature and extent of the groundwater contamination in the area. The first phase of an "early action" shallow groundwater zone extraction pilot

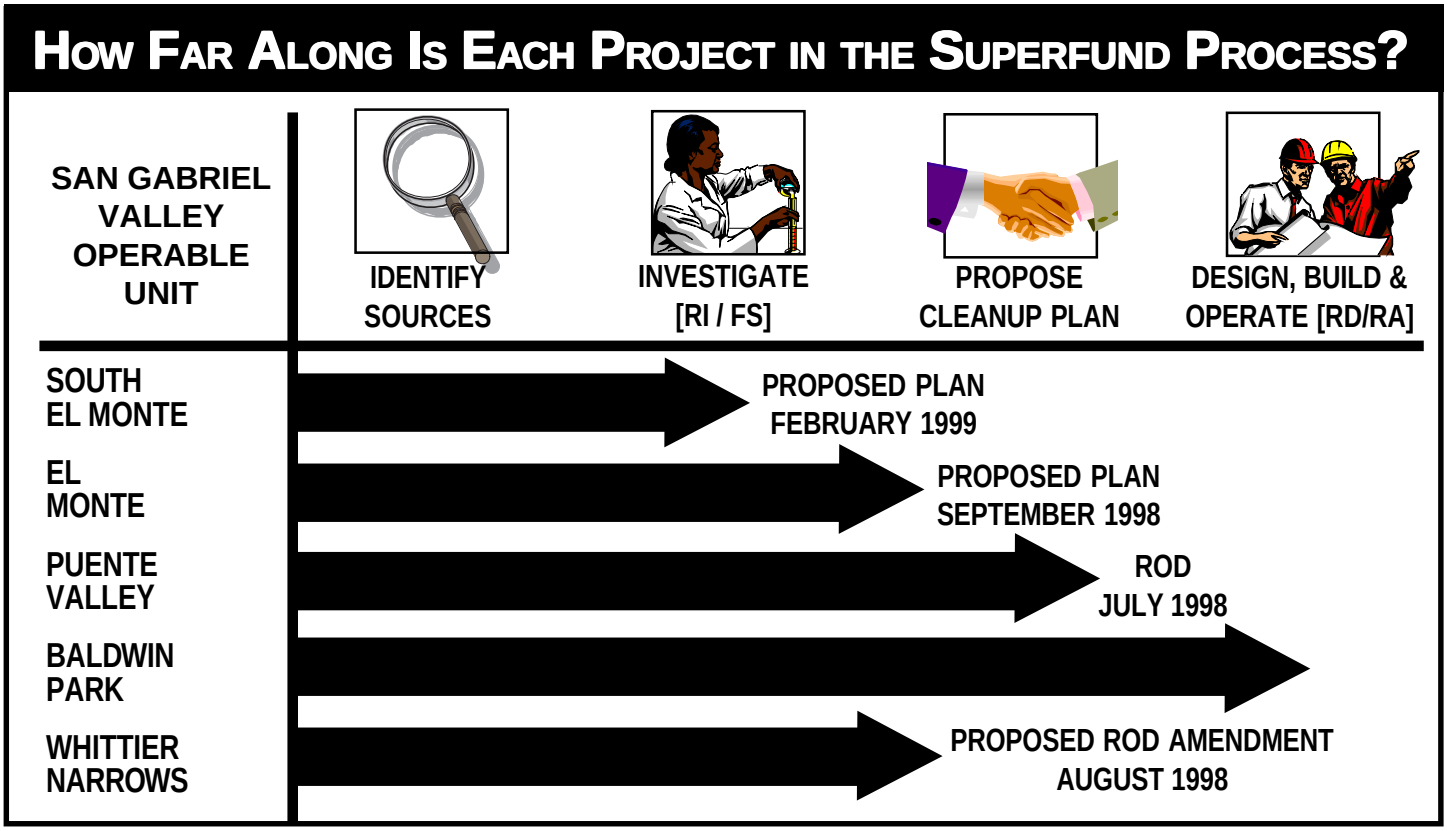

Figure 2: Status of each project area in the Superfund process

program has been completed in an effort to inhibit the migration of high VOC concentrations into the Whittier Narrows OU. The City of South El Monte and the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority contributed to the cost of the first phase of the pilot program. A study of cleanup options is being prepared for release in August 1998. EPA expects to propose a cleanup plan for the South El Monte OU in February 1999.

PUENTE VALLEY OPERABLE UNIT

The Puente Valley OU includes most of the city of Industry and portions of the city of La Puente. VOCs, including tetrachloroethene (PCE) and trichloroethene (TCE), are the primary contaminants detected in groundwater in the Puente Valley Operable Unit. VOC concentrations are typically highest in the shallow groundwater beneath facilities where leaks and spills have occurred. VOCs have also spread to the intermediate groundwater zone and portions of the deep groundwater zone. The PRPs in the Puente Valley OU investigated the nature and extent of contamination in the Puente Valley OU and submitted an investigation report to EPA. EPA completed the study of cleanup options in May 1997 and presented a proposed cleanup plan for the Puente Valley OU at a public meeting in January 1998. EPA expects to sign a Record of Decision (ROD) for the Puente Valley OU in July 1998. After the ROD is signed, detailed specifications for the selected remedy will be developed in negotiations with the PRPs.

WHITTIER NARROWS OPERABLE UNIT

In 1987, EPA began a study of the nature and extent of contamination in the Whittier Narrows area. Although low levels of VOCs were found in some Whittier Narrows wells, all drinking water suppliers were able to meet all State and Federal standards for drinking water quality. The investigation led to a ROD in 1993 that no immediate action was needed but that monitoring and evaluation of the groundwater in the Whittier Narrows area would continue. Since 1996, contaminant levels have increased significantly, and in April 1998, EPA released a draft study of options to prevent groundwater contamination above MCLs from leaving the San Gabriel Basin and entering the Central Basin, which supplies drinking water to the Los Angeles metropolitan area. EPA expects to propose an amendment to the ROD in August 1998, which will address the movement of groundwater contamination through Whittier Narrows. Remedial design work will begin shortly thereafter, continuing until at least Fall 1999. ■

INFORMATION REPOSITORIES

General information on EPA's Superfund Program, as well as copies of fact sheets and technical documents on the San Gabriel Valley Operable Units are available for review at the locations listed below. If you have Internet access, you can also find information about the Superfund Program at http://www.epa.gov (EPA Headquarters home page) and http://www.epa.gov/region09 (EPA Region 9 home page).

Superfund Records Center
95 Hawthorne Street, Room 403 (SFD-7C)
San Francisco, CA 94105
(415) 536-2000

Rosemead Library
8800 Valley Boulevard
Rosemead, CA 91770
(626) 573-5220

West Covina Library
1601 West Covina Parkway
West Covina, CA 91790
(626) 962-3541

Hacienda Heights Public Library
(Puente Valley Operable Unit only)
16010 La Monde Street,
Hacienda Heights, CA 91745
(626) 968-9356

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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.

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