

San Gabriel Valley Superfund Sites Update

U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY • REGION 9 • SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA • JULY 1999

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 eight different project areas, or operable units (OUs): Alhambra, Richwood, Suburban, Baldwin Park, El Monte, South El Monte, Puente Valley, and Whittier Narrows (see map). Status updates on the six active OUs 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 Federal and State drinking water standards.**

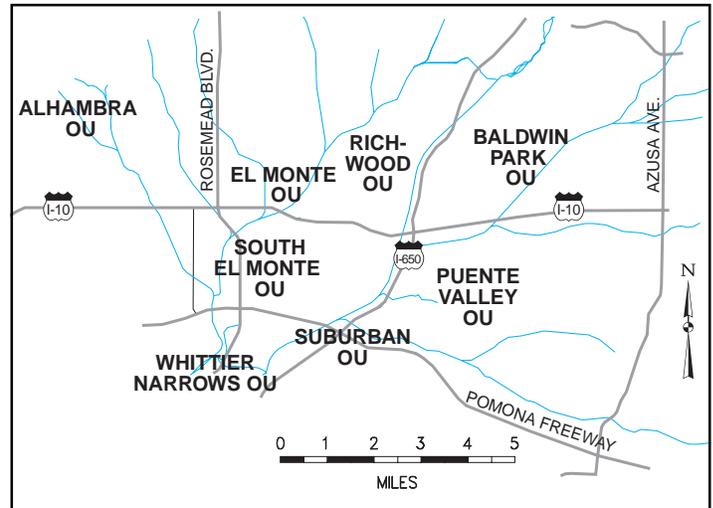


Figure 1: Location map of San Gabriel Valley Operable Units

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.

The 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

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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.

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 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 165 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.

ALHAMBRA OPERABLE UNIT

The Alhambra Operable Unit (OU) is located in the north western portion of the San Gabriel Valley and includes portions of the cities of Alhambra, San Gabriel, Temple City, San Marino, South Pasadena, and Rosemead.

Currently, the EPA is conducting a Potentially Responsible Party (PRP) search within the area to determine which entities are accountable for the groundwater contamination, and who will consequently be responsible for cleanup of the groundwater contamination. The groundwater is contaminated with volatile organic compounds (VOCs) which include, but may not be limited to, trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PCE).

In July 1999, the EPA officially started the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study (RI/FS). The purpose of the RI is to fully determine the nature and extent of contamination and the potential for harm to the public health or welfare or the environment caused by the groundwater contamination at or from the Alhambra

OU. The purpose of the FS is to develop, screen and evaluate appropriate cleanup alternatives to prevent and eliminate the release or the threat of release of contaminants at the site.

BALDWIN PARK OPERABLE UNIT

In March 1994, the EPA adopted a cleanup plan for the Baldwin Park Operable Unit (BPOU), the largest area of groundwater contamination in the San Gabriel Valley. The contamination extends through the cities of Azusa, Irwindale, Baldwin Park, and West Covina, and probably results from the improper handling and disposal of carbon tetrachloride, perchloroethylene,

trichloroethene, and other chemicals, which were used in large quantities at industrial facilities as early as the 1940s.

The EPA's 1994 cleanup plan calls for the construction and operation of groundwater extraction wells, treatment facilities, and conveyance facilities capable of pumping and treating approximately 20,000 gallons per minute of contaminated groundwater. The cleanup will make use of existing water supply wells, treatment systems, and pipelines to reduce costs. EPA's current estimate of the cost of the cleanup is \$85 million in capital costs and \$10 million per year for operation and maintenance.

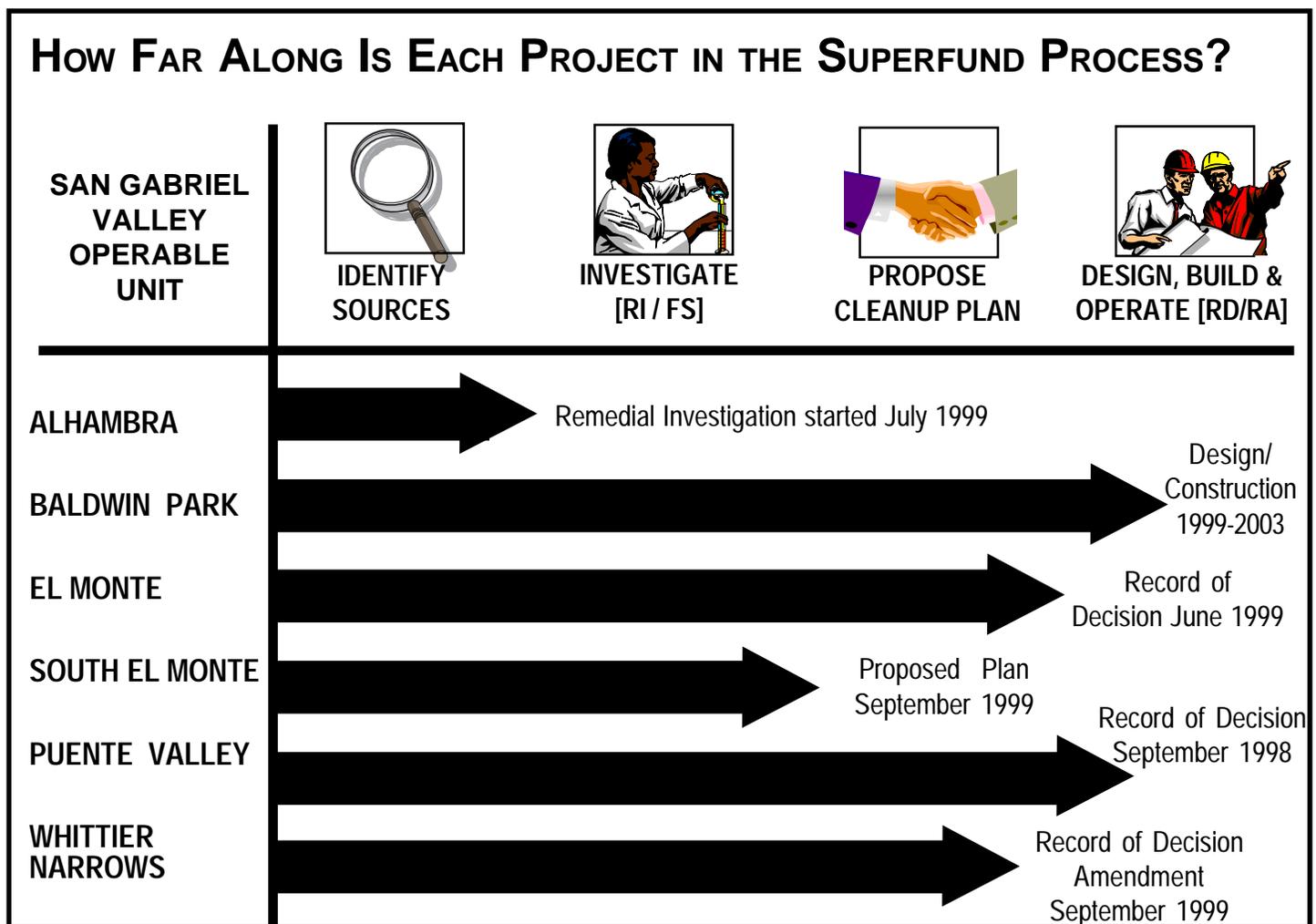


Figure 2: Status of each project area in the Superfund process

In 1995, the EPA began to name the companies responsible for the groundwater contamination at the BPOU. To date, the EPA has named 19 companies and property owners as PRPs. A majority of these companies organized themselves into a group named the Baldwin Park Operable Unit Steering Committee. From 1995 to early 1997, the Steering Committee funded more than \$2 million of “pre-design” work needed as part of the cleanup. The Steering Committee installed and sampled a network of eight deep groundwater monitoring wells to improve our understanding of the extent of contamination and developed a detailed groundwater extraction plan. During this period, intensive negotiations took place to try to determine the best use of the cleaned-up groundwater.

In May 1997, the EPA sent “Special Notice” letters to 19 PRPs to begin formal EPA-PRP negotiations. The EPA’s purpose in initiating the negotiations was to obtain a binding commitment from the PRPs to carry out the Baldwin Park cleanup plan (i.e. to design, construct, and operate the groundwater extraction, treatment, and delivery facilities). The negotiations were expected to conclude in late 1997, but the discovery in June 1997 of perchlorate (a component of solid rocket fuel) at potentially unsafe levels in groundwater forced an extension in the negotiations. At that time, no one knew the extent of perchlorate contamination in the Baldwin Park area and little was known about the cost, effectiveness, and reliability of possible treatment methods. In 1998, two other chemicals, NDMA and 1,4-dioxane, were also discovered in the groundwater.

In response to the discovery of the new chemicals, the EPA extended its formal negotiations with the PRPs through July 1999. In exchange for the extension, the Steering Committee agreed to immediately proceed to complete additional pre-design work, which included tests of perchlorate-removal technologies. The tests have successfully demonstrated that perchlorate can be re-

moved from groundwater to non-detectable levels.

At the same time that the treatment study was underway, the EPA, the PRPs, and local water agencies continued efforts to determine the best use of the treated groundwater. Current negotiations are directed toward using the treated groundwater in the San Gabriel Basin, rather than exporting the water out of the Basin. The Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster and several affected water companies are interested in taking responsibility for building and operating some or all of the Baldwin Park cleanup facilities, and have played an important part in recent negotiations.

On July 2, 1999, EPA received offers from the PRPs to complete portions of the cleanup. Because the offers do not provide adequate commitments to implement the entire remedy, EPA may issue Unilateral Administrative Orders in late July or early August in an effort to avoid any additional delays in carrying out the cleanup.

EL MONTE OPERABLE UNIT

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. VOC concentrations are typically highest in the shallow groundwater beneath facilities where leaks and spills have occurred. VOCs have also spread to the deep groundwater zone. The PRPs in the El Monte OU investigated the nature and extent of contamination in the El Monte OU, submitted an investigation report, and in July 1998, completed a study of cleanup options. The EPA proposed a cleanup plan for the El Monte OU at a public meeting in November 1998. The EPA released a Record of Decision (ROD) in June 1999 which documents the cleanup plan for the El Monte OU. The plan requires

that groundwater contamination in the shallow and deep zone be contained so the contamination does not continue to migrate. The ROD sets forth performance criteria which allow the PRPs the flexibility to determine the best method of containing the contaminated groundwater, yet insures that groundwater will not migrate into clean areas. The PRPs are currently performing pre-design investigation, and the EPA will be working with the PRPs to begin design of the remedy. The EPA anticipates issuing "Special Notice" letters to the PRPs early next year.

SOUTH EL MONTE OPERABLE UNIT

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. A study of cleanup options for the entire operable unit was completed in May 1999. The EPA expects to propose a cleanup plan for the South El Monte OU in September 1999. A proposed "early action" groundwater extraction project for the shallow groundwater contamination is being implemented in an effort to inhibit the migration of high VOC concentrations from South El Monte into the Whittier Narrows OU. Some of the parties working together to implement this project include the South El Monte PRPs, the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority, the Water Replenishment District of Southern California and EPA.

PUEENTE 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 released a ROD in September 1998 which documents the cleanup plan for the Puente Valley OU. The plan requires that groundwater contamination in the shallow and intermediate zones be contained so the contamination does not continue to migrate. The ROD sets forth performance criteria which allow the PRPs the flexibility to determine the best method of containing the contaminated groundwater, yet insures that groundwater will not migrate into clean areas. EPA is currently working with the PRPs to begin design of the remedy. The EPA expects to issue "Special Notice" letters this Fall commencing the negotiations with the PRPs to build the remedy.

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 State and Federal standards for drinking water quality. The investigation led to a ROD in 1993 that determined 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 contami-

nation above MCLs from leaving the San Gabriel Basin and entering the Central Basin, which supplies drinking water to the Los Angeles metropolitan area. In October 1998, EPA proposed an amendment to the ROD which addresses the movement of groundwater contamination through Whittier Narrows. The proposed ROD amendment describes the actions to be taken to contain the groundwater contamination, including installation of groundwater extraction wells in the deep and shallow zones, treatment to remove the contaminants and groundwater monitoring.

The EPA will issue an amended ROD this Summer. The design of the cleanup action will likely take a year. In the meantime, the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority plans to extract and treat contaminated groundwater from an EPA well located at the leading edge of the contaminant plume. This action should slow the migration of contamination while the final cleanup action is under development.



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
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MAILING LIST COUPON

For additional information about the San Gabriel Valley Superfund Sites,
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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.

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

West Covina Library

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

Rosemead Library

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

Hacienda Heights Public Library

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

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