

# Fast Track

A Publication of the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority

July 2000

## WQA Applies for State Funds to Speed South El Monte Cleanup



The San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority has applied for nearly \$7 million in state funding to speed groundwater cleanup in the Rosemead-South El Monte area, where contamination is growing and water supplies are shrinking.

“We need immediate action to meet this water supply crisis,” said Kirby Brill, WQA Executive Director. “Levels of contamination at production wells are increasing at an alarming rate, and there is an imminent and growing threat to other groundwater supplies.”

The state water bond issue, which was approved in March, contains \$7 million to be allocated by the State Department of Toxic Substances Control for groundwater remediation projects. The money was put into the bond issue at the request of the WQA.

The WQA applied to the state in May for \$6,975,000 to help pay for a \$9.3-million project to construct treatment plants at wells belonging to the City of Monterey Park, San Gabriel Valley Water Company, Southern California Water Company and California-American Water Company. A grant from the U. S. Bureau of Reclamation would pay for the remaining construction cost. Operation and maintenance costs, which are estimated at \$950,000 a year, would be paid from other sources, including businesses that may have contributed to the contamination.

Before submitting the funding request, the WQA met with water producers and others to gain a consensus on the most critical need for state assistance. The result of those discussions was a decision to focus on the water supply crisis developing in the northwest portion of the area designated by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency as the South El Monte Operable Unit. Contamination there has already forced closure of some wells and, unless checked, the contamination could reach even more critical groundwater production centers. To expedite the project, the WQA has already signed a funding agreement with the City of Monterey Park and contracted for preliminary testing required by the state. (See stories on the back page).

The U. S. EPA has developed a proposed cleanup plan and eventually will require companies that contributed to the contamination to help pay for cleanup. But it may take many months, if not years, for the EPA to reach agreement with the companies. And under EPA policies, the companies cannot be mandated to integrate the cleanup with the water supply network, so immediate relief is far from assured. Finally, even if negotiations were to proceed smoothly, EPA-mandated cleanup facilities would not be in operation before 2003.

Brill said, “We cannot afford to wait for the EPA process to run its course or we will find ourselves with decreasing local water supplies and increasing reliance on expensive water imported from the Colorado River or northern California.”



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## WQA Raises Assessment to Finance Accelerated Cleanup

In order to finance an accelerated plan to clean up contaminated groundwater, the WQA Board has increased the assessment levied on water producers who hold pumping rights in the San Gabriel Basin. The new rate is \$10.91 per acre-foot for capital improvements and \$2.40 for administration. The administrative rate is unchanged, but the capital assessment was raised from \$7.74 per acre-foot to pay for an aggressive effort to clean up contaminated groundwater, solve critical water supply problems and recover costs from polluters.

## WQA, Monterey Park Join to Clean Up Water, Restore Supply

● The WQA and the City of Monterey Park have approved an agreement to finance construction of groundwater treatment facilities that will allow the city to reopen a well that has been shut down by contamination and also drill another well nearby. The cleanup and water supply project will cut off the flow of contaminants to prevent pollution from spreading westward.

The agreement calls for work on the project to begin immediately, while the WQA pursues funding sources, including state bond money and contributions from companies that may have contributed to the contamination. Under the agreement, the WQA will be responsible for 75% of the \$2 million cost of the project, and the city will be responsible for the remainder, pending receipt of other funding.

The city will administer and supervise the project and will own the cleanup facilities. The treatment plant will be constructed on a .33-acre site in Rosemead, where the City of Monterey Park drilled a well in 1968. The well is closed because of contamination by volatile organic compounds. The compounds are believed to have seeped into groundwater years ago before industrial companies or regulators were aware of the dangers posed by careless handling of degreasing agents.

The project will treat water from the reopened well and also water piped to the site from a new well drilled nearby. In all, the project will produce up to 4,500 gallon a minute of purified water for delivery to the city's customers. The agreement calls for construction to be completed by June 30, 2002.

## Contamination Creates Water Shortage in La Puente

● The La Puente Valley County Water District Board of Directors has asked its customers to reduce water usage by 25% in the months of July, August and September because of water supply shortages created by the spread of groundwater contamination.

The District's wellfield was shut down in 1997 because of contamination by perchlorate and N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA). Since then, the District has been buying water from four neighboring water producers, but two of those will be unable to provide water this summer because of their own contamination problems.

The District, with the financial help of the WQA, Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster and the Upper San Gabriel Valley Municipal Water District, has built a \$5 million treatment plant to remove contaminants so it can reopen its wells. Although the plant is fully operational, the water cannot be used until the State Department of Health Services gives final approval. The six-month review process is still underway, but could take many more months. The La Puente District provides water to 9,000 residents in La Puente and the City of Industry.

## State Increases Testing Process

● The WQA has allocated \$200,000 to Stetson Engineers, Inc. to conduct water analyses and health risk assessments required by the State Department of Health Services for the South El Monte cleanup project. The requirements, which increase costs and lengthen the permitting process, stem from a 1997 policy memo in which the state established new criteria that must be met in order to use treated water as drinking water.

WQA Calendar		
<b>WQA Board Meetings</b>	<b>July 24</b>	<b>5 p.m.</b>
	<b>August 7</b>	<b>5 p.m.</b>
<b>WQA Engineering Committee</b>	<b>August 1</b>	<b>10 am.</b>
<b>WQA Administration/ Finance Committee</b>	<b>August 1</b>	<b>Noon</b>
<b>WQA Legislative/Public Information Committee</b>	<b>August 8</b>	<b>3:30 p.m.</b>
Board and Committee meetings are held at the WQA Office, 858 Oak Park Road, Suite 200, Covina, CA 91724.		