

San Gabriel Valley Superfund Sites Update

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The San Gabriel Basin aquifer provides approximately 90% of the domestic water supply for the San Gabriel Valley's residents. Over 400 water supply wells are used in the basin to extract groundwater for industrial, business, and domestic uses. Forty-five different suppliers of water operate in the basin and provide drinking water to more than one million people.

Widespread pollution of groundwater by industrial chemicals, particularly volatile organic compounds (VOCs) such as trichloroethene (TCE), perchloroethylene (PCE), and carbon tetrachloride, prompted the EPA in 1984 to add four areas of the San Gabriel Valley to the National Priorities List (or Superfund list) of the country's most hazardous waste sites. The four San Gabriel Valley Superfund sites include areas of groundwater contamination underlying approximately 30 square miles of the valley's 170-square-mile area. To facilitate investigation and cleanup of the groundwater, EPA divided the four sites into eight project areas, or operable units (OUs), of which six are still active (see map).

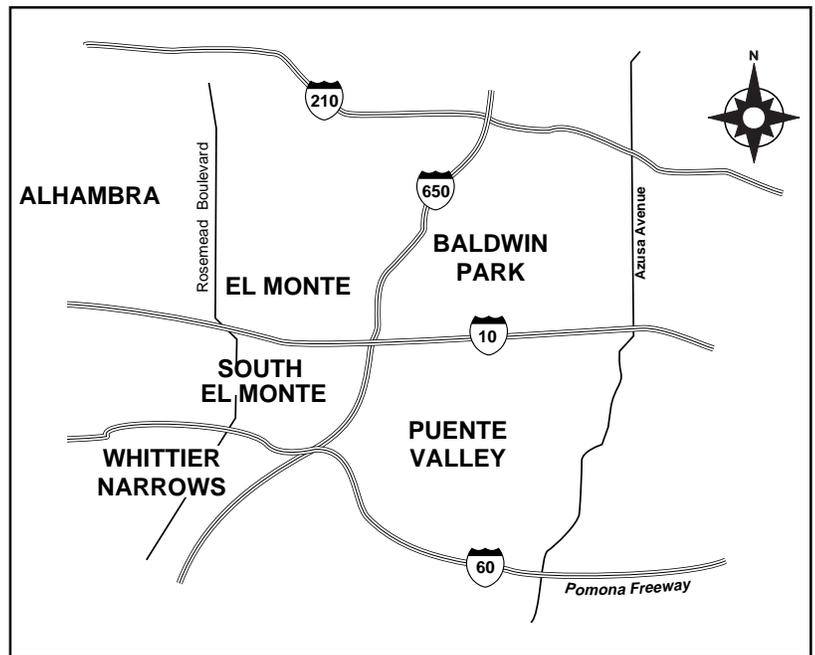


Figure 1: Locations of San Gabriel Valley Operable Units

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 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, local water purveyors, and local municipalities and agencies to study and clean up soil and groundwater contamination in the San Gabriel Valley (see Site History, inside). The water utilities have been able to continue to provide customers with clean water by shutting down wells in contaminated areas, treating water to remove contaminants, blending water to meet drinking water standards, and obtaining water from neighboring utilities. **Currently, all drinking water provided by water purveyors in the San Gabriel Valley meets Federal and State drinking water standards.**

This fact sheet provides an update on the status of cleanup efforts at the six active operable units. For more information, EPA's July 1999 San Gabriel Valley Superfund Site Update provides a history of actions taken at each operable unit, and the EPA Region 9 web site (<http://yosemite.epa.gov/r9/sfund/overview.nsf>) also provides detailed descriptions and histories of the sites.

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AREA 1 OPERABLE UNITS

El Monte OU

The El Monte Operable Unit includes parts of the cities of El Monte, Rosemead, and Temple City.

Contaminants: Volatile organic compounds are the primary contaminants found at concentrations above the maximum contaminant levels allowed by Federal and State law. The highest concentrations are typically in the shallow groundwater beneath facilities where leaks and spills have occurred, but contamination has also spread to the deep groundwater zone. EPA has recently discovered several new pollutants, including perchlorate (a component of solid rocket fuel), N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA, associated with liquid rocket fuel), 1,4-dioxane (used as a stabilizer in some solvents), and hexavalent chromium (Cr⁺⁶) in the shallow groundwater and has included them among the contaminants to be remediated.

Milestones: EPA released a Record of Decision (ROD) in June 1999 that requires potentially responsible parties (PRPs) to keep groundwater contamination from spreading while it provides them the flexibility to determine the best method of meeting this requirement. The EPA issued "Special Notice" letters to the Potentially Responsible Parties (PRPs) on July 12, 2001, beginning negotiations with the PRPs to build and operate the remedy.

Current status: Negotiations with the PRPs started in November 2001 and are expected to continue into mid-2002. The PRPs are currently performing pre-design work and EPA will be working with them to begin design of the remedy. EPA is planning to issue an explanation of significant differences (ESD) in June 2002 to add treatment for perchlorate and other newly detected contaminants to the remedy specified in the ROD.

South El Monte OU

The South El Monte Operable Unit includes parts of the cities of South El Monte, El Monte, and Rosemead.

Contaminants: Volatile organic compounds are the primary contaminants found in the South El Monte OU groundwater above maximum contaminant levels allowed by Federal and State law. EPA has recently discovered several new pollutants, including 1,4 dioxane and perchlorate (a component of solid rocket fuel), in the groundwater and will include them among the contaminants to be remediated.

Milestones: EPA released a Record of Decision (ROD) in September 2000 that requires potentially responsible parties (PRPs) to keep groundwater contamination from spreading while it provides flexibility to determine the best method of meeting this requirement. The EPA issued "Special Notice" letters to the PRPs on March 28, 2002, beginning the negotiations with the PRPs to build and operate the remedy.

Current status: EPA will be working with the PRPs to begin design of the remedy. EPA is planning to issue an explanation of significant differences (ESD) or an amendment to the ROD in July 2002 to add treatment for perchlorate and other newly detected contaminants to the remedy specified in the ROD.

Whittier Narrows OU

The Whittier Narrows Operable Unit is in the southern San Gabriel Basin, just north of the Whittier Narrows Dam, and separates the San Gabriel Basin from the Central Basin. It includes the area south of the Pomona Freeway (Highway 60) and north of the Montebello Forebay area of the Central Basin.

Contaminants: Levels of volatile organic compounds in groundwater moving through the Whittier Narrows from the San Gabriel Basin into the Central Basin have been increasing for several years.

Milestones: In November 1999, EPA issued an amendment to the original Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD amendment specified a project to contain the groundwater contamination, including installing groundwater extraction wells, pumping and treating the groundwater to remove the contaminants, and monitoring the contamination. In January 2000, the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority (WQA) began pumping and treating contaminated groundwater from an EPA well located at the leading edge of the highest concentration area of the shallow-zone contamination. EPA took over operation of this system in May 2001 and later incorporated the extraction well into the Whittier Narrows OU cleanup system.

EPA began construction of the full Whittier Narrows OU cleanup system specified in the amended Record of Decision in June 2001 and completed it in March 2002.

Current status: EPA began startup and testing operations to monitor performance of the Whittier Narrows OU system in March 2002. The system will pump

an average of 11,000 gallons per minute and treat the water to drinking water standards. The treated water is currently discharged to surface water bodies. When the necessary agreements and infrastructure are in place, the treated water will be available to water purveyors to provide drinking water to residences and businesses in the area.

AREA 2 — BALDWIN PARK OPERABLE UNIT

The Baldwin Park Operable Unit is the largest area of groundwater contamination in the San Gabriel Valley. It extends through the cities of Azusa, Irwindale, Baldwin Park, West Covina, La Puente, and City of Industry.

Contaminants: Carbon tetrachloride, perchloroethylene, and trichloroethene (commonly used for degreasing and cleaning) are the primary contaminants in the Baldwin Park OU. In 1997 and 1998, EPA discovered several new pollutants, including perchlorate (a component of solid rocket fuel), N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA, associated

with liquid rocket fuel), and 1,4-dioxane (used as a stabilizer in some solvents) in the groundwater and has included them among the contaminants to be remediated.

Milestones: EPA selected the remedy for the Baldwin Park Operable Unit in 1994 and in 1995 began negotiating with PRPs to design and construct the treatment systems specified in the Record of Decision. During these negotiations, between 1995 and 1997, a network of deep monitoring wells was installed and other pre-design work was completed. Negotiations with water agencies over the use of treated water occurred in parallel.

The discovery in 1997 of new contaminants in the groundwater delayed the construction of the treatment systems. In mid-1999, after treatability studies showed that available technologies could reliably remove perchlorate and NDMA from groundwater, EPA resumed negotiations with the PRPs. However, after several attempts to reach a final, binding agreement, EPA ceased negotiating and issued a Unilateral Administrative Order in 2000

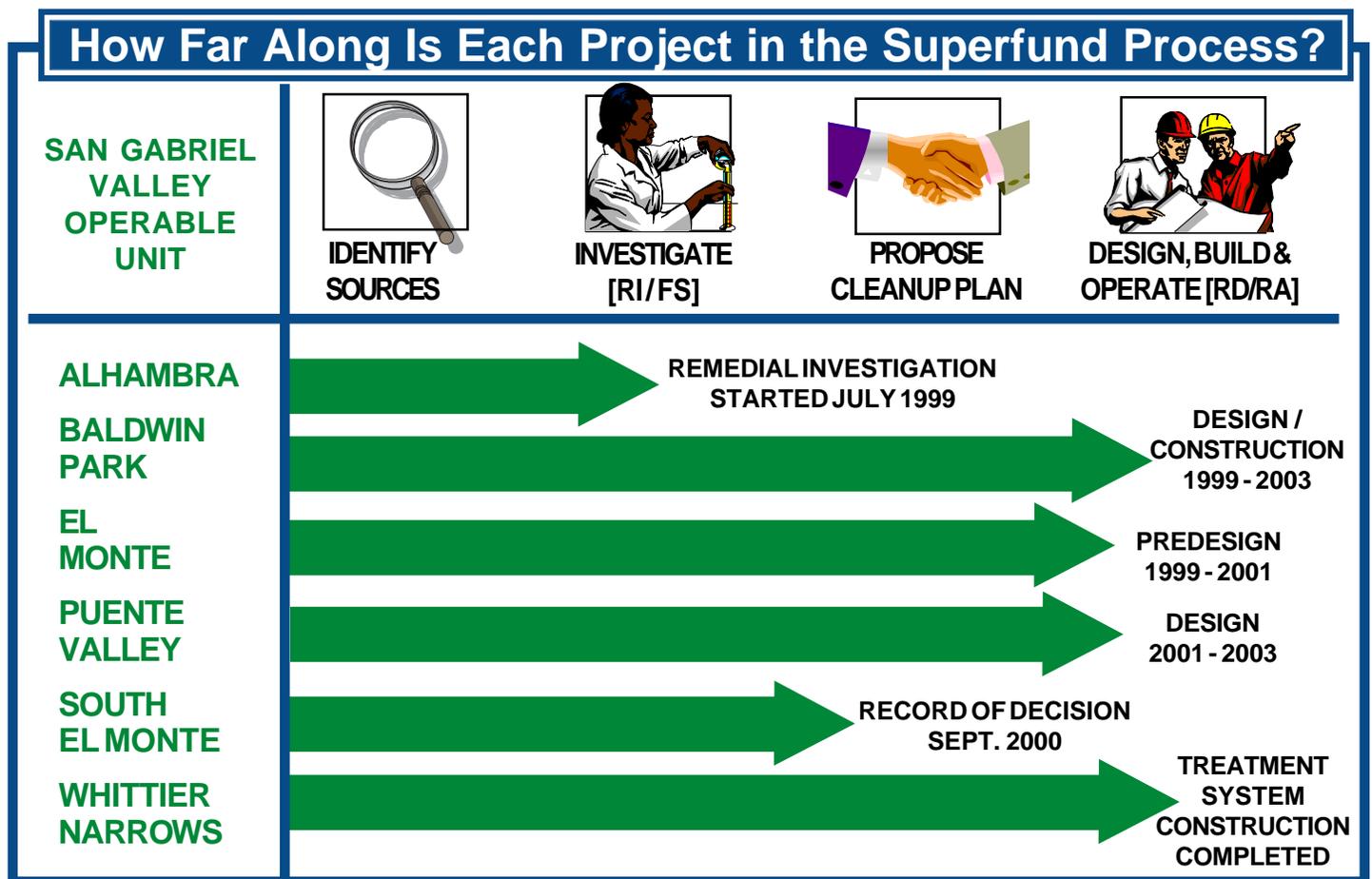


Figure 2: Status of each project area in the Superfund process

Site History

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.

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 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. EPA has sent "no further action" letters to over 2,000 parties to inform them that EPA does not believe that they have contributed to the groundwater contamination.

directing the 19 PRPs to complete the remedial design and make arrangements for the construction and operation of the BPOU groundwater extraction wells, treatment systems, and related cleanup facilities. During the negotiations, pre-design work was on-going.

Meanwhile, the PRPs and local water agencies, with EPA actively mediating, continued negotiations to work out arrangements for the construction and operation of a joint cleanup and water supply project that would meet EPA's cleanup goals and local communities' water supply needs. The negotiations addressed a variety of issues, including PRP and water agency roles and responsibilities, repayment of past water agency costs, treatment technology selection, contracting procedures, financial assurances, efforts to obtain public funds, audit requirements, insurance requirements, dispute resolution procedures, and oversight. In January 2001, the PRPs and the water agencies reached an agreement in principle, which stated that the water agencies would design, build, and operate the treatment facilities, with PRP and EPA oversight, and that the PRPs would pay most costs. Finally, in March 2002, eight PRPs and seven water agencies signed a 300-plus-page, final, binding agreement resolving all issues.

Current status: As of May 2002, the first of the four treatment systems, the La Puente Valley County Water District project, is completed and supplying treated groundwater for potable use. The second treatment system of the Baldwin Park OU, the San Gabriel Valley Water Company B6 system, is beginning construction and the third treatment system, the Valley County Water District system, is about to begin construction. These two systems should be completed in late 2002 or early 2003. The fourth and last treatment system, the San Gabriel Valley Water Company B5 system, is in the design phase and is due for completion in mid-2003.

AREA 3 — ALHAMBRA OPERABLE UNIT

The Alhambra Operable Unit is in the northwestern part of the Valley and includes parts of the cities of Alhambra, San Gabriel, Temple City, San Marino, South Pasadena, and Rosemead.

Contaminants: The primary contaminants in the Alhambra OU are volatile organic compounds (VOCs) including trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PCE).

Current status: EPA is continuing to search for potentially responsible parties (PRPs) in the area. Through a cooperative agreement with EPA, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board has been investigating several facilities in the area as part of the PRP search. Several facilities have completed soil gas investigations and will be beginning groundwater investigations. EPA is currently evaluating available information to identify PRPs. During the summer of 2002, EPA will request chemical use history and facility information for several additional facilities in the Alhambra Operable Unit. EPA is also continuing the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study (RI/FS), begun in 1999, to determine the potential for harm to the public health and the environment and to develop cleanup alternatives. EPA will install several groundwater monitoring wells in July 2002 to collect data to help define the extent of contamination in the OU.

AREA 4 — PUENTE VALLEY OPERABLE UNIT

The Puente Valley Operable Unit occupies an approximately 12.5-mile-long and 2- to 2.5-mile-wide tributary basin to the main San Gabriel Basin in eastern Los Angeles county. It includes most of the City of Industry and parts of the city of La Puente.

Contaminants: The primary contaminants in the Puente Valley OU are various industrial solvents also known as volatile organic compounds, including, but not limited to, tetrachloroethene (PCE) and trichloroethylene (TCE).

Milestones: EPA released a Record of Decision in September 1998 that specified pumping the groundwater and treating it to remove contaminants. EPA issued "Special Notice" letters for remedial design and remedial action (RD/RA) in September, 2000, which commenced the negotiations with the PRPs to build the remedy. In 2001 EPA issued an Order to one potentially responsible party (PRP) to design and construct the shallow-zone groundwater treatment system. When the PRP did not comply with the Order, EPA took over the remedial design and expects to complete it in 2003. EPA issued an Order to design and build the system for the intermediate groundwater zone in 2002. The PRP complied with this Order and has begun to design the treatment system.

Current status: Design work is underway for both the shallow and intermediate zone remedies.

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(800) 231-3075
and we will return your call

Media inquiries

Lisa Fasano, Southern California Press Officer:
(415) 947-4307

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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