

San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority

Addressing PFAS to Continue Safeguarding Groundwater



By Elizabeth Smilor
Special Sections Writer

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Randy Schoellerman
WQA Executive Director

Like the regional water agencies, the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority is excited to see more water flowing through the spreading basins and into the groundwater Basin. The WQA also is steadfast in its commitment to coordinate efforts to clean up the Basin to ensure clean, safe drinking water.

That job is now more vital, time-consuming and costly due to emerging contaminants including PFAS (per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances) widely used long-lasting chemicals that break down very slowly.

“Our agency is responsible for overseeing the cleanup and restoration of the groundwater Basin,” said WQA Executive Director Randy Schoellerman. “The Basin has been impacted by PFAS detected in numerous wells requiring the construction of additional treatment systems.”

On March 14, the U.S. EPA announced the proposed National Primary Drinking Water Regulation, which would establish legally enforceable levels called Maximum Contaminant Levels for six PFAS compounds in drinking water.

PFAS, considered “forever” chemicals because they remain in the environment, were compounds produced mainly by the 3M and DuPont companies and used by them and a variety of other manufacturers to produce everything from Teflon for pots and pans to Scotchgard for fabric protection.

On March 17, the WQA filed a lawsuit against 3M, DuPont and other companies seeking to recover the costs of cleaning up PFAS from the Main San Gabriel Basin.

“Ongoing remediation costs associated with the PFAS contamination will continue for decades,” Schoellerman said. “It is part of our mission to pursue responsible parties for those costs.”

“The WQA will continue to ensure safe, reliable drinking water for the residents of the San Gabriel Valley.”

Mark Paulson
WQA Board Chairman

There are 33 active groundwater treatment plants in the San Gabriel Basin. The WQA has coordinated cleanup efforts that have resulted in the treatment of nearly 2 million acre-feet of water. An acre-foot is equal to 325,551 gallons. Though variable, about 200,000 acre-feet of water is pumped from the Basin annually and used as domestic supply.



Judy Chu

The WQA lawsuit becomes one of hundreds of similar lawsuits filed by cities, states, water agencies and others in the last several years. It alleges the defendants knowingly contaminated drinking water over a period of years in the Basin (and across the country) as a result of the manufacture and use of a group of more than 4,000 synthetic harmful chemical compounds, collectively known as PFAS.

“We are taking this action so that San Gabriel Valley residents are not burdened with the additional cost of the PFAS cleanup,” said WQA Board Chairman Mark Paulson. “The WQA remains committed to holding those responsible for the contamination accountable. The WQA will continue to ensure safe, reliable drinking water for the residents of the San Gabriel Valley.”

“The WQA is critically important to the future of the San Gabriel Valley because it is cleaning up the water in the very important water basin.”

Judy Chu
U.S. Congresswoman

In addition to pursuing funds from responsible parties, the WQA receives funding from the state and federal governments. For a second consecutive year, the WQA received \$10 million in federal funding. The federal funds were appropriated into the San Gabriel Basin Restoration Fund (Restoration Fund) following more than a decade without federal funds. Congress has authorized \$125 million for the Restoration Fund, of which \$94.5 million has been appropriated and allocated to cleanup projects by the WQA.

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The WQA was established by the State Legislature in 1993 to develop, finance, and implement groundwater treatment programs in the San Gabriel Basin after contaminants were identified in the late 1970s.

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water basin. The San Gabriel Basin is a huge asset that was contaminated by the industries of the past,” said Congresswoman Judy Chu, whose 28th District includes parts of the San Gabriel Valley, including Alhambra, Monterey Park, Rosemead, San Gabriel, Pasadena and Claremont. “The WQA has been able to get funds from the polluters and the state. It was a long time coming to get federal funds.”



Grace Napolitano

The WQA is currently pursuing additional federal funds for fiscal year 2024. This funding helps the WQA leverage funding from the state and lessens the burden on local ratepayers.

“Without the WQA, this cleanup wouldn’t have come this far. They’ve helped tremendously in remediating the San Gabriel Basin that provides 90 percent of water to 1.4 million people downstream, of which more than 400,000 are in disadvantaged communities. Clean water is important for them,” said Congresswoman Grace Napolitano, whose 31st District covers much of the San Gabriel Valley from Monrovia to La Verne to La Puente.

The vital role of the WQA was also reinforced by the decision of the California State Legislature in 2022 to extend the life of the Authority to July 1, 2050. Prior legislation extended the WQA to July 1, 2030, but local stakeholders advocated for the extension because certain financing and projects agreements go beyond 2030.

“Our coordination of this cleanup has made a difference in protecting this vital groundwater basin and our efforts will continue for decades more to ensure a clean, safe and reliable regional water supply,” said Schoellerman. ○

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Learn how the WQA is keeping your water safe and clean at www.wqa.com.



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