



At far left and above is the Puente Valley Intermediate Zone Remedy Operating Unit, which is one of 32 active groundwater treatment facilities that are integral to the cleanup coordinated by the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority. At left, the water percolates into the groundwater basin from the Santa Fe Spreading Grounds near the 210-605 freeway interchange.

# Sustaining a Clean, Reliable Water Supply

## San Gabriel Basin WQA Addresses Emerging Contaminants

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**Mark Paulson**  
WQA Board Chairman

To be sustainable, a water supply must be safe and clean. For 1.4 million people in the San Gabriel Valley, clean water depends upon a clean groundwater basin that supplies about 80 percent of the area’s drinking water.

“The Basin restoration is critical for a sustainable groundwater supply. Our mandate is to remove contaminants to ensure a safe, reliable source,” said San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority (WQA) Executive Director Randy Schoellerman.

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. The contamination is believed to be the result of decades of improper chemical handling and disposal practices by various industries. As a result, water suppliers had to shut down wells and large portions of the basin were placed on the federal Superfund cleanup list in 1984.

There are 32 active groundwater treatment plants in the San Gabriel Basin. The WQA has coordinated cleanup efforts that have resulted in the treatment of more than 2 million acre-feet of water. An acre-foot is equal to 326,000 gallons.

However, the cleanup continues and the role of the WQA remains vital especially considering the onset of new investigations and regulations regarding emerging contaminants, such as PFAS (Per- and Polyfluorinated Substances).

“We are at the forefront in supporting the remediation of these ‘forever chemicals’ that have become a major area of concern around the world,” said WQA Board Chairman Mark Paulson. PFAS, which remains in the environment, has been used to manufacture everything from Teflon for pots and pans to Scotchgard for fabric protection. “We remain dedicated to ensuring San Gabriel Valley residents have a clean, safe and reliable water supply.”

In March 2023, the U.S. EPA proposed a National Primary Drinking Water Regulation to establish legally enforceable levels, called Maximum Contaminant Levels, for six PFAS contaminants in drinking water. That same month, WQA filed a lawsuit against 3M, DuPont and other companies in an effort to recover cleanup costs the in Basin.

“Our agency is responsible for overseeing the cleanup and restoration of the groundwater Basin,” said Schoellerman in announcing the lawsuit. “The Basin has been impacted by PFAS detected in numerous wells requiring the construction of additional treatment systems. Ongoing remediation costs associated with the PFAS contamination will continue for decades. It is part of our mission to pursue responsible parties for those costs.”

The WQA lawsuit is 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.

The San Gabriel Basin is the primary source of drinking water for 25 cities and unincorporated areas of the San Gabriel Valley. The cleanup coordinated by the WQA includes funding from state and federal monies as well as contributions from the responsible parties. This funding helps to lessen the burden on local ratepayers.

In the past two fiscal years, the WQA has received two \$10 million federal allocations as well as some State grants. The California Legislature has extended the life of the WQA to July 1, 2050.

“We will continue to advocate for funding to address emerging contaminants,” said Schoellerman. “Our goal is to restore this vital groundwater supply for future generations.” ■



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