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Perchlorate cleanup set to begin

NASA engineers charged with the multimillion-dollar cleanup of rocket-fuel component perchlorate in Pasadena and Altadena groundwater are set to begin this month, said Steve Slaten, remedial coordinator for NASA's groundwater cleanup at Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

Perchlorate is a toxic rocket fuel component that was once used at JPL but is now polluting area groundwater supplies. The explosive ingredient in rocket fuel has been linked to thyroid damage, and according to Associated Press reports, has recently been discovered in the milk of California cows.

As the Weekly reported in May, perchlorate pollution is believed to be spreading underground as much as one foot per day. But help is on the way, as cleanup plans are finally going into effect.

In two weeks or less, contaminated water from two Altadena water wells will be pumped into an ion exchange unit that will separate perchlorate from the water at the suppliers' locations before it is pumped back into the ground.

"The approach here is that NASA fully funds the installation and operation of treatment systems for the effective water purveyors, which will allow them to use their resource while simultaneously cleaning up the groundwater," said Slaten, who joined the NASA cleanup project in December after 17 years with the EPA and the Department of Energy.

Slaten said that the first ion exchange system is presently being built at the Lincoln Avenue Water Co. and should be operational this month. Lincoln Avenue Water Co. had a remediation agreement with NASA "a couple of years ago," while the city of Pasadena only recently hammered out the technological specifics of cleanup in June.

NASA will have a cleanup station for Pasadena wells running in Fall 2005.

The costs for the systems will be borne via long-term leases rather than outright purchase. NASA will reimburse "several hundred thousand dollars per year" for the treatment systems' cost.

— *Carl Kozlowski*

(Please visit www.pasadenaweekly.com for an expanded version of this story.)