

Officials push for chromium 6 cleanup

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Concerned about extensive chromium 6 contamination of San Fernando Valley groundwater, local officials are working on several fronts to push polluting companies to clean up the suspected carcinogen.

A new report by San Fernando Valley Watermaster Melvin Blevins warns that migrating plumes of chromium 6, also known as hexavalent chromium, could force the closure of drinking wells in North Hollywood, Burbank and Glendale if the groundwater isn't cleaned up soon.

"My concern is that there is very little being done to bring these companies in to do what's needed," he said. In response to Blevins' report, Los Angeles County Supervisor Michael D. Antonovich this week asked his colleagues to urge state and federal water regulators to push polluting companies to clean up the contamination. The board postponed action.

And on Friday, state senators will hold a hearing on allegations that corporate interests manipulated a state-sponsored report that found no evidence that orally ingested chromium 6 causes cancer. Chromium 6 crusader Erin Brockovich will lead off the hearing, scheduled for 11:30 a.m. in Room 381B at the Hall of Administration, 500 W. Temple St.

The recent activity highlights concerns about a chemical that has percolated into Valley groundwater supplies since the 1940s, when heavy industry, defense contractors and aerospace businesses set up shop along the rail lines in Glendale, Burbank and the eastern San Fernando Valley.

The first potential targets in the chromium 6 cleanup effort are some five dozen companies already bound by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to clean up a slew of volatile organic compounds that taint wide swaths of the aquifer.

"We know that chromium 6 is a problem and we know Mr. Blevins is working hard to protect health and the environment with this report," said EPA spokesman Mark Merchant. "It's going to take time to review."

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Local water officials say the EPA doesn't feel a sense of urgency about chromium 6 contamination because the levels haven't yet exceeded federal standards for drinking water. But that hasn't stopped local efforts to clean it up.

"We know our customers do not want that level of chromium in their water. They wouldn't drink it," said Donald Froelich, a Glendale Water and Power water services administrator who is overseeing a pilot project to remove chromium 6 at one of the city's treatment plants.

Congressman Adam Schiff, D-Pasadena, announced Wednesday that Glendale is getting an additional \$900,000 in federal funding for the project.

In addition, state water regulators also have ordered five companies to study the groundwater under their sites for signs of contamination: PRC-DeSoto International, Coltec Industries Inc. (former Menasco Aerospace Division), Drilube Co., Honeywell International Inc. and Lockheed Martin.

A Honeywell spokesman said last week his company had not seen the order but has been working with state water officials to clean up contamination at its former Allied-Signal site.