



ORANGE COUNTY WATER DISTRICT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Gina Ayala, (714) 378-3323, gayala@ocwd.com

LOCAL AND FEDERAL EFFORTS PROTECT ORANGE COUNTY WATER SUPPLY DURING DROUGHT

FOUNTAIN VALLEY, Calif. (Jan. 14, 2016) — As California prepares for a fifth year of drought it calls for all responsible water managers across the state to protect and invest in our limited water resources. As guardian of the Orange County Groundwater Basin, which provides the region with three-fourths of its water supply, the Orange County Water District (OCWD; the District) has long implemented programs to replenish and protect this valuable water supply. The drought prompts the District to expand its efforts and accelerate plans for groundwater protection.

Several years ago, OCWD identified volatile organic compound (VOC) pollutants in the shallow groundwater beneath decades old industrial manufacturing facilities in the northern portion of the basin (the North Basin). The District immediately took steps to study, clean up and contain this contamination. This process, known as the North Basin Groundwater Protection Project (NBGPP), has been comprehensive with activities on several fronts including legal, regulatory and technical.

An important new development in the NBGPP is the arrival of the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as the official regulatory oversight agency. It has the capacity, authority and expertise to address groundwater contamination in complex cases and has done so in many basins throughout Southern California at scales even larger than this. Its structured approach to oversight of the cleanup is expected to produce greater participation from the responsible parties and increased opportunity for cost recovery for remediation work voluntarily taken on by the District.

In a recent letter to state and regional environmental offices, the EPA stated it “understands the vital importance of groundwater resources for meeting the drinking water need of Orange County, where the groundwater basin supplies water to 19 cities and approximately 2.4 million residents. As groundwater becomes even more valuable during this period of severe drought, EPA recognizes the urgent priority of preserving clean drinking water resources to continue to meet the current and future drinking water needs of Southern California.”

-MORE-

LOCAL AND FEDERAL EFFORTS PROTECT ORANGE COUNTY WATER SUPPLY DURING DROUGHT

“The District supports the EPA’s goal to clean up the North Basin to assure public health and support the economic viability of Orange County,” said OCWD President Cathy Green. “I am very proud of OCWD’s sound management of the basin, which has included innovative approaches to aquifer replenishment and the identification and control of water quality threats. OCWD will take all steps necessary to protect and sustain the uninterrupted use of this precious resource," she added.

At a December 16 OCWD board meeting, representatives from the EPA echoed the importance of cleaning up the contamination. They outlined the reasons why EPA assumed a regulatory oversight role in the North Basin and its plans to manage the project through a process that includes transparency and community involvement. This is the first of many meetings the EPA will hold regarding this important cleanup project.

In the meantime, the OCWD and local water agencies continue to monitor the contamination plume and water supplies to ensure only clean water is delivered to homes and businesses. The District tests water from approximately 1,500 locations throughout the groundwater basin, analyzes more than 20,000 samples annually and reports over 400,000 results. This extensive testing is conducted at OCWD’s internationally recognized Advanced Water Quality Assurance Laboratory. OCWD also provides regional testing of more than 200 drinking wells for local water retailers to help ensure compliance with monitoring and reporting requirements mandated by the federal Safe Drinking Water Act.

Since it was formed in 1933, the District has fulfilled its mission to protect the basin and provide a high-quality, reliable water supply to the 19 water retail agencies it serves. It has long been recognized as an international leader in groundwater management and this expertise was recently sought after by legislators and the Governor’s administration when developing the historic California Sustainable Groundwater Management Act of 2014.

About OCWD

The District is committed to enhancing Orange County’s groundwater quality and reliability in an environmentally friendly and economical manner. The following cities utilize the groundwater basin managed by OCWD and receive approximately 70 percent of their water supply from it: Anaheim, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Irvine, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Newport Beach, Orange, Placentia, Santa Ana, Seal Beach, Stanton, Tustin, Villa Park, Westminster and Yorba Linda. For more information about the Orange County Water District and its board of directors, call (714) 378-3200 or visit www.ocwd.com.