



## NEWS RELEASE

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### ORANGE COUNTY GROUNDWATER CLEANUP SITE PROPOSED FOR FEDERAL PRIORITY

**FOUNTAIN VALLEY, Calif.** (January 9, 2018) – Today, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed listing the North Basin Groundwater Cleanup (North Basin) site on the National Priority List (NPL). Its proposed listing of the site follows a series of other steps including a hazard ranking analysis and concurrence from California’s Governor to list the North Basin. The listing process will include a public comment period where all interested parties will have an opportunity to comment on the proposed listing and the project itself. The North Basin process is somewhat unique for a site not yet listed because the Remedial Investigation and Feasibility Study (RI/FS) have already begun under a cooperative voluntary agreement between the Orange County Water District (OCWD) and EPA. The RI/FS is scheduled to be completed in summer 2020. Formal listing of the site in the coming months would allow access to additional funding and stronger enforcement against those responsible for the contamination.

At the completion of the RI/FS, a remediation project will be selected from a list of options based on many criteria, including, but not limited to: overall protection of human health and the environment; compliance with applicable, or relevant and appropriate requirements; long-term effectiveness and permanence; reduction of toxicity, mobility and/or volume; short-term effectiveness; implementability; and, cost.

The North Basin site, located in the cities of Fullerton, Anaheim and Placentia, contains a five-mile long plume of contamination that has caused five drinking wells to be taken out of service. The contamination consists of industrial solvents, referred to as volatile organic compounds (VOCs), that spilled into the ground from past industrial/manufacturing activities. Residents’ drinking water is safe; however, the contamination is moving toward the deep aquifer of the Orange County Groundwater Basin which is managed by OCWD. The North Basin Cleanup effort will control the plume from spreading and prevent further well closures.

“North Basin falls squarely within EPA’s core function of enforcement and compliance with the nation’s environmental laws,” stated OCWD President Denis Bilodeau. “The innovative proactive approach to address the problem before it takes out more drinking water wells will provide for expedited protection of a critical groundwater resource. EPA’s work will also complement other work under local and state agency control. This multifaceted approach should also expedite engagement of potentially responsible parties regardless if formal enforcement action is ultimately taken.”

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After conducting extensive studies and research, OCWD has implemented a multiprong cleanup strategy that includes voluntary cleanup work, litigation, settlement agreements, state and federal oversight, and solicitation of grant funding. Listing North Basin on the NPL, which was endorsed by the State of California in 2017, would allow the cleanup of the site to proceed after many years of negotiations and legal proceedings with potentially responsible parties.

Six extraction wells (EWs) were drilled by OCWD several years ago. Until recently, none of those wells were placed into service for the capture and control of the plume spreading. The delay in well completion was the result of legal challenges, including a CEQA lawsuit. After waiting a few years for a resolution of the legal challenges and considering new directions set with EPA, the OCWD Board of Directors took it upon themselves to direct staff to complete and start operating EW-1 which is considered one of the most important of the original six wells due to its location upgradient of two drinking water wells. OCWD engineers redesigned the well to allow discharge of the contaminated water to the nearby sewer. EW-1 became fully operational in November 2017.

The water discharged by EW-1 is sent to the sanitary sewer that is tributary to the Orange County Sanitation District's (OCSD) Plant 1 where it is treated extensively and then sent to OCWD's Groundwater Replenishment System (GWRS) to undergo a three-step advanced purification process. The purified water, which exceeds drinking water standards, is then put back into the groundwater basin for subsequent reuse.

In addition to working with EPA, OCWD is seeking state funding to help offset costs of the North Basin RI/FS work and the construction of the pumping systems and piping for EW-1. Grant funds cannot be used for long-term operation of remedial systems. OCWD will be looking to potentially responsible parties to fund those operations through collaboration, litigation or by order of the EPA.

Congress established the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), also known as Superfund, in 1980 to allow EPA to clean up contaminated sites. It also compels the parties responsible for the contamination to either perform cleanups or reimburse the government for EPA-led cleanup work. When there is no viable responsible party, Superfund gives EPA the funds and authority to clean up contaminated sites.

As part of the NPL process, EPA will conduct informational briefings on North Basin in the affected communities. For more information about the EPA's NPL process, visit <https://www.epa.gov/superfund/superfund-cleanup-process>. For more information about OCWD's North Basin Cleanup effort, visit <https://www.ocwd.com/what-we-do/water-quality/groundwater-cleanup/>.

### ***About OCWD***

The Orange County Water District is committed to enhancing Orange County's groundwater quality and reliability in an environmentally friendly and economical manner. The following cities rely on the groundwater basin, managed by OCWD, to provide 75 percent of their water demands: Anaheim, Buena Park, Costa Mesa, Cypress, Fountain Valley, Fullerton, Garden Grove, Huntington Beach, Irvine, La Palma, Los Alamitos, Newport

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Beach, Orange, Placentia, Santa Ana, Seal Beach, Stanton, Tustin, Villa Park, Westminster and Yorba Linda. For more information about OCWD, please visit [www.ocwd.com](http://www.ocwd.com).

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