

Groundwater Treatment Plant Begins Operating

Sipping from a clear cup containing on-site treated tap water, NASA Deputy Administrator Fred Gregory voiced his approval: “Ah, that’s good!” The water is from a treatment system paid for by NASA at an Altadena, California water company. The system is part of NASA’s approach to clean up chemicals in groundwater underneath and near the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, disposed of when the Army used the facility to do rocket research. NASA manages the groundwater cleanup project at JPL in accordance with the federal Comprehensive Environmental Response and Compensation Liability Act (CERCLA). NASA is cleaning up solvents and other chemicals that were disposed of in seepage pits in the 1940s and 1950s, common practice at that time. About the same time that NASA took over the site, in the late ‘50s, a sewer system was installed and the disposal of chemicals through seepage pits ceased. Now, years later, chemicals have traveled deep underground to some nearby water supply wells. The wells were immediately turned off upon detection of the chemicals and NASA is taking actions to address the problem and complete the cleanup. While NASA has been funding the nearby water companies’ removal of volatile organic compounds since 1992, because of the more recent detection of the rocket fuel ingredient perchlorate in the deep groundwater in 1997, NASA has agreed to fund removal of the perchlorate as well.

One of the adjacent water companies, Lincoln Avenue Water Company, held an Open House on July 29, 2004, in Altadena, California, to mark the turn on of the first local treatment plant to remove perchlorate from groundwater.

The treatment plant will treat 2,000 gallons per minute to reduce perchlorate to non-detectable levels that meet the State's public health goal.

At the Open House, NASA's Deputy Administrator Fred Gregory joined community leaders, water company officials and regulatory agencies in recognizing the landmark nature of the event.

"In January, I came here to pledge to your customers that in the spirit of good neighborliness, NASA will continue to take action on this water cleanup project. I am here to make good on our promise," said Mr. Gregory.

In June, LAWC reported that perchlorate levels at its two drinking water wells exceeded the state of California's new Public Health Goal (PHG) of 6 parts of perchlorate per billion parts of water. The two wells had already been closed, ensuring that its customers have continually received safe drinking water.

The system is being turned on in time to meet the increased summer demand and help speed up the groundwater cleanup. While recognizing the efforts of the California and federal regulators, the manufacturers of the treatment plant, the LAWC Board of Directors and Bob Hayward, LAWC's General Manager, Steve Slaten, NASA's remedial project manager observed, "It reminds me that in partnership with our neighbors, we can get a lot done."



NASA's Deputy Administrator Fred Gregory (left) and LAWC's General Manager Bob Hayward (right), recently launched LAWC's Ion Exchange System to remove perchlorate from groundwater.



NASA's Deputy Administrator Fred Gregory holds up a glass of clean tap water, taken from the Lincoln Avenue Water Company system that has removed perchlorate from the groundwater.