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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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A series of studies focusing on local groundwater contamination is under way at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory.

The studies, designed to comply with requirements under the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Superfund program, will measure pollution that may have resulted from waste disposal practices that were common during the 1940s and 1950s when JPL was an Army laboratory.

Based on tests completed by the Laboratory last year, JPL officials believe it is likely the Laboratory will be named shortly to the EPA's National Priorities List, a roster of some 1,200 sites nationwide ranked as having the highest priority for remediation.

In the current studies, JPL is installing groundwater monitoring wells and conducting 30 to 40 deep soil borings to help engineers understand the sources of pollution affecting groundwater at the Laboratory.

After those studies are completed, JPL will weigh various alternative solutions and propose a cleanup plan to the EPA as well as to state and local agencies involved.

Because JPL is on federal property, it is not eligible for EPA funding under the so-called Superfund -- the common name

for the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act of 1980. The Laboratory's cleanup, rather, would be paid by its present federal sponsor, NASA.

As was common and accepted practice during the 1940s and 1950s, JPL disposed of wastes through cesspools. As sewers became accessible to the Laboratory in the late 1950s, JPL discontinued the use of cesspools.

Through the years, JPL policy and practices have continued to follow federal and state procedures for waste disposal as they became defined.

In 1986, Congress passed the Superfund Amendments and Reauthorization Act (SARA), requiring federal facilities to investigate past waste management at their sites.

To comply with that act, JPL in 1990 conducted new studies including a site inspection and installation of five monitoring wells around JPL property.

Those studies uncovered several volatile organic compounds -- trichloroethylene (TCE), perchloroethylene (PCE), carbon tetrachloride (CTC) and the chemical 1,1-dichloroethene -- at levels exceeding California drinking-water standards in at least one of the monitoring wells.

JPL forwarded those results to the EPA, which then scored the Laboratory on the environmental agency's Hazard Ranking System.

Based on knowledge of the ranking system, JPL officials believe that the Laboratory is likely to be included on the next

update of the EPA's National Priorities List, expected to be announced this year.

As part of the current work -- known as a remedial investigation/feasibility study -- JPL will consider alternative solutions and develop a cleanup plan to be proposed to the federal EPA and the California Environmental Protection Agency. The current study will continue through about 1993.

After a cleanup plan is approved and documented in what is known as a record of decision, detailed engineering designs will be drawn up and cleanup will begin.

The type of cleanup is yet to be determined, and options may change as new technologies become available.

In conjunction with the current test program, JPL is carrying out community relations surveys to improve communication with local residents during the tests and cleanup.

Residents interested in receiving updates on progress of the program are encouraged to call (818) 354-0112 or write to Public Services Office, Mail Stop 180-205, Jet Propulsion Laboratory, 4800 Oak Grove Drive, Pasadena CA 91109.

Operated for NASA by the California Institute of Technology, JPL has as its primary mission exploration of the solar system with robotic spacecraft. The Laboratory passed from Army to NASA jurisdiction when the space agency was created in 1958.

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