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JPL Water Cleanup Efforts to Increase

By Charles Cooper

NASA's ongoing effort to clean up contaminated water under the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in La Cañada will be ramped up, under a plan just released.

The plan, available online and at local libraries, will be discussed at a community meeting Nov. 16 from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Altadena Community Center, 730 E. Altadena. The website is jplwater.nasa.gov.

The cleanup effort has been underway for a number of years, and reflects problems caused during early days at the lab, from about 1945-60. The site has been declared a Superfund cleanup project, and NASA has promised to follow through with a full remediation.

The plan being discussed at the Nov. 16 meeting is to accelerate the cleanup of the groundwater adjacent to the lab by adding two new wells, one for extraction of water and one to inject processed water, to the treatment facility on the JPL campus.

The water flows to wells serving Altadena and Pasadena, and is not part of any wells serving La Cañada, according to officials.

The cleanup effort was launched in 1992, and first dealt with volatile organic chemicals. Since then, emphasis has shifted to the issue of perchlorate contamination. Perchlorate is a suspected hazard to the human thyroid system.

Estimated cost of the upgraded system is about $1 million, and the cleanup process could continue for another ten years, according to project manager Steve Slaten.

A separate plan will be developed to deal with issues raised by the city of Pasadena over perchlorate problems in many of its wells.

Pasadena closed as many as nine of its wells because of perchlorate issues, and has bought Metropolitan Water District imported water to make up for its shortages.

Slaten said NASA is continuing its discussions on the issue with Pasadena, which filed a claim for added costs, and will develop a plan next year for wells beyond the immediate vicinity of JPL.

He said NASA has been working successfully with Lincoln Avenue Water, a small company that serves Altadena, to remediate its water supply.

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