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NASA report exonerates JPL in pollution of 5 water wells

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STAFF WRITER

PASADENA — A NASA report quietly released late last month concludes that the Jet Propulsion Laboratory's Superfund site did not pollute five city water wells shuttered because of perchlorate contamination.

The report's conclusions could keep the city from receiv-

ing federal funding for the treatment plant required to reopen the wells. City officials estimate the plant would cost \$2.2 million to construct and \$1.5 million annually to operate.

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration is currently funding cleanup at two Altadena wells tainted by

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CLEANUP REPORT

► More information will be available from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. today at the Maranatha High School cafeteria, 169 S. St. John Ave., Pasadena, and 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Thursday at the Altadena Public Library community room, 600 E. Mariposa St., Altadena.

WELLS

City hopes for cleanup help

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the toxins, which leached from waste pits used at JPL in the 1940s and '50s. A treatment plant for four more Pasadena wells is planned for completion in 2008.

"We've had success with dealing with the first series of wells, and it really is no surprise that NASA would begin the discussion about the next series by raising a question of responsibility," said Mayor Bill Bogaard of the report. "I would say it's almost predictable."

Some city officials had been operating under the assumption that the contamination at the second set of wells, near Sunset Reservoir east of the Rose Bowl, would also be traced back to the Superfund site.

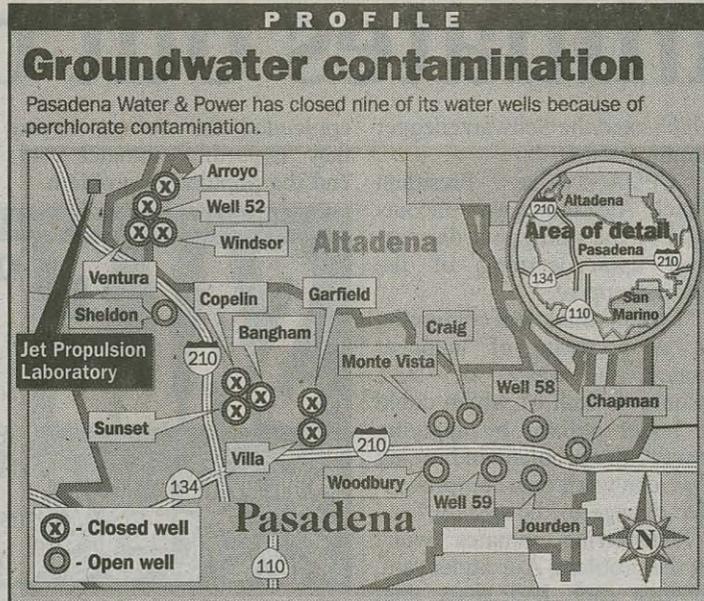
"I don't know too many people who spilled rocket fuel around here other than NASA," said Councilman Victor Gordo. "I would hope that rather than hide behind some report, NASA would join the city in cleaning it up."

Perchlorate, a component of rocket fuel, can interfere with thyroid function to cause tumors and possibly harm developing fetuses.

For the report, NASA modeled groundwater motion and studied the chemistry of the water and of the perchlorate. They concluded that the Sunset Reservoir-area wells were contaminated by a combination of natural sources and man-made perchlorate different than what was used at JPL.

City officials have agreed that regardless of the report's conclusions, the wells needed to be cleaned. The question remains, though, whether Pasadena — which filed a \$2 million claim against NASA in 2004 to recoup the costs of the well closures — will be left to foot this new bill on its own.

"We would hope that NASA would join us in attempting to



SOURCES: United States Environmental Protection Agency and City of Pasadena Staff graphic by MANUEL AMAYA

secure federal funds to clean up the perchlorate, whether or not it came from NASA," Gordo said.

"NASA is committed to being a good neighbor to Pasadena and will take responsibility for the chemicals that originate from this site," said Steve Slaten, the remedial project manager for the JPL pollutants.

However, he said, "I'm not authorized to spend taxpayer's money to clean up chemicals that are not associated with this site."

At least one of the three regulatory agencies overseeing the cleanup process have agreed with the conclusions of the NASA report. City officials are still reviewing it, said Shan

Kwan, the Department of Water and Power's director of water. That process could take several more weeks.

More information about the report, as well as about the new water plant planned for northwest Pasadena and additional wells for cleaning the groundwater beneath JPL, will be available at public meetings today and Thursday.

Today's meeting, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m., is at the Maranatha High School cafeteria, 169 S. St. John Ave., Pasadena. Thursday's meeting is at the Altadena Public Library's community room, 600 E. Mariposa St., from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

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