

Northrop Grumman steps up

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Our View: Northrop Grumman steps up

IN the 25 years since the Environmental Protection Agency declared five areas of the San Gabriel Valley's main drinking water source Superfund sites, it's a rare day on which we can editorialize on the cleanup going well. Today is one of those days.

That's because defense contractor Northrop Grumman last week signed an agreement with the EPA to contribute \$21 million for building and running the Puente Valley operable unit, one of the five EPA-named projects that correspond with the polluted portions of the Valley's aquifer. The other "operable units" are: Baldwin Park, El Monte, South El Monte and Area 5, which includes Alhambra.

It's ironic, really, during a week when most Valley residents were concerned about air quality due to particulates suspended in the air from massive wildfires that the condition of their ground-

water improved. But we'll take progress in this protracted battle any day.

Northrop Grumman deserves praise for bringing together 43 other aerospace companies on 60 properties in the Puente Valley (Industry, Walnut

and La Puente) responsible for leaking volatile organic compounds that can cause cancer into the groundwater over past decades and offering payment. The chemicals were used in degreasing, mainly to clean machinery and equipment, according to the EPA. These companies dumped spent chemicals into waste pits, either unaware or indifferent to the fact that the Valley's soil - mostly porous alluvial fan - accommodates the rapid seepage of liquids into the water table. Ever since 1979, when a well in Irwindale was found contaminated, well after well across the region was shut down by the EPA when levels of contaminants climbed above safe levels.

That meant that water quantity decreased. Water quality is upheld by moving to a different well in a noncontaminated portion, or by blending water imported from the Colorado River. Nonetheless, in the last three years, as the latest drought intensified, drinking water supplies from the Colorado and from Northern California have evaporated, increasing the importance of our Valley's local water supply.

Which brings us to the second good thing about this agreement. Not only will a treatment plant be built near the corner of Sunset and Nelson in Industry, but the water will be treated to drinking-water standards. Some of it will be taken by the San Gabriel Water Company and sent to customers, and the rest will be discharged into San Jose Creek, where the flow will recharge the basin with clean water. Smart moves by increasingly wise water agencies and companies.

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Local water agencies, along with the state Water Quality Authority, should be credited with devising a plan that does not waste the treated water - a resource that becomes more valuable every day.

We're told the Northrop Grumman agreement will fund treatment plant construction and operation for eight years. But that's not enough to guarantee a completely clean aquifer beneath the Puente Valley. The WQA estimates it will take another \$60 million in operating costs to come clean. With a new deal just announced between the defense giant and the

U.S. Navy and Army for

various defense projects worth nearly \$6 billion, Northrop can afford to extend its contract for clean water until the job is done.

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