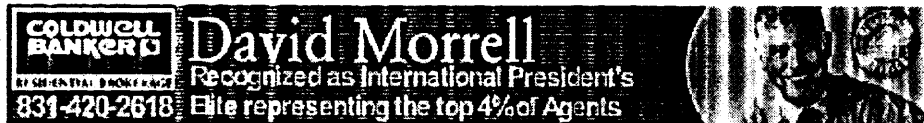
 Print Article | Close Window


March 26, 2005

Chemical cleanup solutions elusive

By **JONDI GUMZ**
SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

SCOTTS VALLEY — A spike in a carcinogenic chemical near a source of drinking water for city residents puzzles experts, who have different ideas on what cleanup strategy should be pursued.

One thing they agree on: There is no quick and easy solution.

"Based on our experience, solvent contamination cleanup usually takes a long time," said Wei Liu, a geologist on the staff of the state Regional Water Quality Control Board, which oversees such cleanups.

"You're talking decades," said Jill Duerig, general manager of the Scotts Valley Water District. "You never do get them all the way clean. The question is how much are you allowed to leave in the ground."

Tetrachloroethane, also known as PCE, was found in a monitoring well in 2001 and traced to Scotts Valley Cleaners in the Kmart shopping center. Yung Ku, owner of the dry cleaners, said she doesn't use the chemical any more, but a quantity of PCE remains underground.

Duerig is concerned because the monitoring well that records higher levels of the chemical is only 500 feet from a well producing water for her customers.

Liu said the increase "appears to be localized" near the monitoring well, but the reason "is not clear." He did not have information about whether PCE was being used or whether it had been replaced.

Concentrations of the chemical have stayed at similar levels "during the past several years," he said, and it doesn't appear that a new release of the chemical is to blame.

"Groundwater moves slowly but it's unpredictable," Duerig said.

That's why she wants more to be done to prevent the contamination from migrating into a well that supplies drinking water.

Secor, the company hired by The Pratt Co., which owns the shopping center, has been pumping out contaminated groundwater while studying the situation.

Secor was checking samples monthly in the hot spot until December. Then monitoring lapsed for two months; the company cited various logistical and mechanical problems.

That worries Duerig. She wants the regional board to consider ordering removal of the contaminated soil as well as the contaminated groundwater.

She also questions whether the new monitoring wells are deep enough to detect contamination.


Liu doesn't want the monitoring wells to be deeper. Drilling through a dry layer at the bottom of the water-bearing zone might make it easier for contamination to travel downward, he said.

The pumping is only an interim step, he said, and once the chemical plume is "fully controlled," the board will require the company to submit a new plan for long-term remediation.

Duerig hopes that will be sooner instead of later.

"We're trying to come up with a treatment system so we wouldn't have to shut the well down," she said.

Contact Jondi Gumz at jgumz@santacruzsentinel.com.

 Print Article

You can find this story online at:

<http://www.santacruzsentinel.com/archive/2005/March/26/local/stories/11local.htm>

Copyright © Santa Cruz Sentinel. All rights reserved.

