CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

NEWS RELEASE

Department of Toxic Substances Control

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DTSC Orders Interim Measure to Protect Colorado River

Los Angeles—The California Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) today announced that it has ordered Pacific Gas and Electric (PG&E) to begin the removal of hexavalent chromium contaminated groundwater to prevent it from impacting the Colorado River.

The order directs PG&E to convert several existing groundwater monitoring wells into extraction wells to remove contaminated water before it reaches the river and to expeditiously evaluate building a groundwater containment barrier in an effort to stop future groundwater from encroaching the river, which is a major source of drinking water for Southern California.

Recent sampling, at a well 150 feet from the river, revealed hexavalent chromium in groundwater at levels exceeding State of California drinking water standards. The contaminated groundwater is associated with PG&E's Topock facility near Needles, California.

"We have ordered PG&E to take this action to preserve the integrity of the river," said DTSC Director Ed Lowry. "We have taken samples from the river, which has not been impacted. However, by taking these additional measures we will ensure that the contamination does not reach the river," Lowry added.

The action by the DTSC was based on a sample collected on January 29, 2004. The sample was taken from a groundwater monitoring well at a depth of 80 feet below the ground surface. Laboratory analysis reported hexavalent chromium at 111 parts per billion (ppb). Additional samples taken at other monitoring wells showed "non-detect" for the contaminant. The drinking water standard in California is 50 ppb for chromium.

Upon receiving the analysis, DTSC immediately required PG&E to submit and implement a workplan designed to pump and gain control of the contamination plume. Water pumped from the converted wells will be placed on trucks for off-site treatment and disposal. PG&E was also ordered to conduct studies to determine how best to engineer and design a groundwater containment barrier.

Furthermore, DTSC has required weekly sampling of the Colorado River and selected wells near the river. To date, hexavalent chromium has not been detected in water samples from the river, or its sediments. Groundwater from the contaminated area is not used for drinking or other purposes.

PG&E has owned and operated the Topock Compressor Station located about 15 miles southeast of Needles since 1951. PG&E uses the Topock facility to compress natural gas for transportation through pipelines to its service territory in Central and Northern California. Hexavalent chromium was used as an additive in cooling tower water as a corrosion inhibitor between 1951 and 1985.

DTSC, the lead agency for the cleanup, is collaborating with a consultative workgroup including the Regional Water Quality Control Board, Colorado River Basin Region, United States Department of the Interior, United States Bureau of Land Management, United States Bureau of Reclamation, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, United States Bureau of Indian Affairs, and the Metropolitan Water District.

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The Department of Toxic Substances Control's mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the environment and ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality by regulating hazardous waste, conducting and overseeing cleanups, and developing and promoting pollution prevention.