

House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Water and Power

"Protecting Groundwater Resources"

Witness: Rialto Councilman Joe Baca, Jr.

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I am a lifelong resident of Rialto who is concerned about the groundwater contamination and how it impacts our local residents both financially and their personal well being. Since I grew up and live in Rialto, I have a personal connection to this issue.

The perchlorate contamination case in Rialto is not the first of its kind. There was a previous case in the San Gabriel Valley that provided a model for the Inland Empire. In 1992, a coalition of cities and water agencies came together as a coalition to push for Senate Bill 1679. This legislation developed the San Gabriel Basin Water Quality Authority. It was an important step in cleaning up the hazardous substances found in their groundwater. What was key about the legislation is that a collaborative solution came out of their partnership. It was not about different agencies searching their own solution; rather, it was about what was best for the region and its residents.

That is the hope that I have for Rialto and the Inland region. It is my hope that our cities and agencies follow their lead in addressing the perchlorate plume in our groundwater.

As the former chair of the State Assembly Select Committee on Perchlorate Contamination, my focus has always been on tackling the complex issues with perchlorate contamination of our groundwater. I proposed developing standards to safely handle the disposal of products containing perchlorate; charging a fee to those companies who develop products with perchlorate in order to fund perchlorate cleanup; and to use the State General Fund to assist with the Perchlorate contamination cleanup. This legislation was a direct result of collaboration among cities, water agencies, and grassroots organizations, like the Center for Community Action and Environmental Justice and Librería del Pueblo.

However, my advocacy did not stop at legislation. After researching perchlorate contamination, I was surprised to learn that perchlorate products were being sold through E-Bay. I became concerned that the public had free access to perchlorate without knowing how to properly dispose of it. In a letter to eBay North America President William Cobb, I asked the cyber giant to stop selling perchlorate on its online market. After a few months, perchlorate was removed.

My efforts were preceded by Senator Nell Soto who also put much of her focus on perchlorate contamination. In 2003, Senator Nell Soto, the chair of the Senate Select Committee on Perchlorate Contamination, authored Senate Bill 922. The legislation forced water quality control boards to enforce clean up and abatement if there are findings of drinking water contamination.

It was not until recently that we learned about the affects of human consumption of perchlorate. Recent studies have shown that perchlorate interferes with absorption of iodine. The thyroid gland needs iodine to make hormones such as thyroxine that controls metabolism in all people and guide nerve and brain development in fetuses and babies.

That is why the City of Rialto has taken a "zero tolerance" policy on perchlorate contamination and have assessed a perchlorate fee through the monthly water bill to assure drinking water does not have any detectable levels of perchlorate, which, according to our current technology, is less than 4 ppb. They have done so with the promise that we will be reimbursed in the future.

While Rialto residents are enjoying safe drinking water, they are doing so because they have personally financed the clean up of our contaminated wells. We need to find solutions that will allow us to cleanup our groundwater contamination in a timely manner. The monthly \$6.85 perchlorate flat fee, in addition to the formula for big water users, is an added financial burden for Rialto residents. Rialto residents are largely low-income with the median family income in the City of Rialto being \$42,638. They are barely making it through these difficult financial times. They are struggling to meet the high cost of living that has already been brought on by the housing, utilities, and fuel.

Our residents depend on us to doing the right thing. We have to be able to draw upon similar objectives with other agencies and cities in order to obtain our ultimate goal. We cannot lose sight of our main objective to offer quality drinking water to our residents. We must also look towards the future to assure our water supply is not threatened.

There is a lot of work ahead of us. As residents, we look to our federal government and its elected officials for assistance.