



RIALTO: State requests input on perchlorate contamination



A 1955 aerial photograph shows the 160-acre site in north Rialto where various industries are suspected of spilling or disposing of chemicals in ways that polluted groundwater, affecting current water supplies.

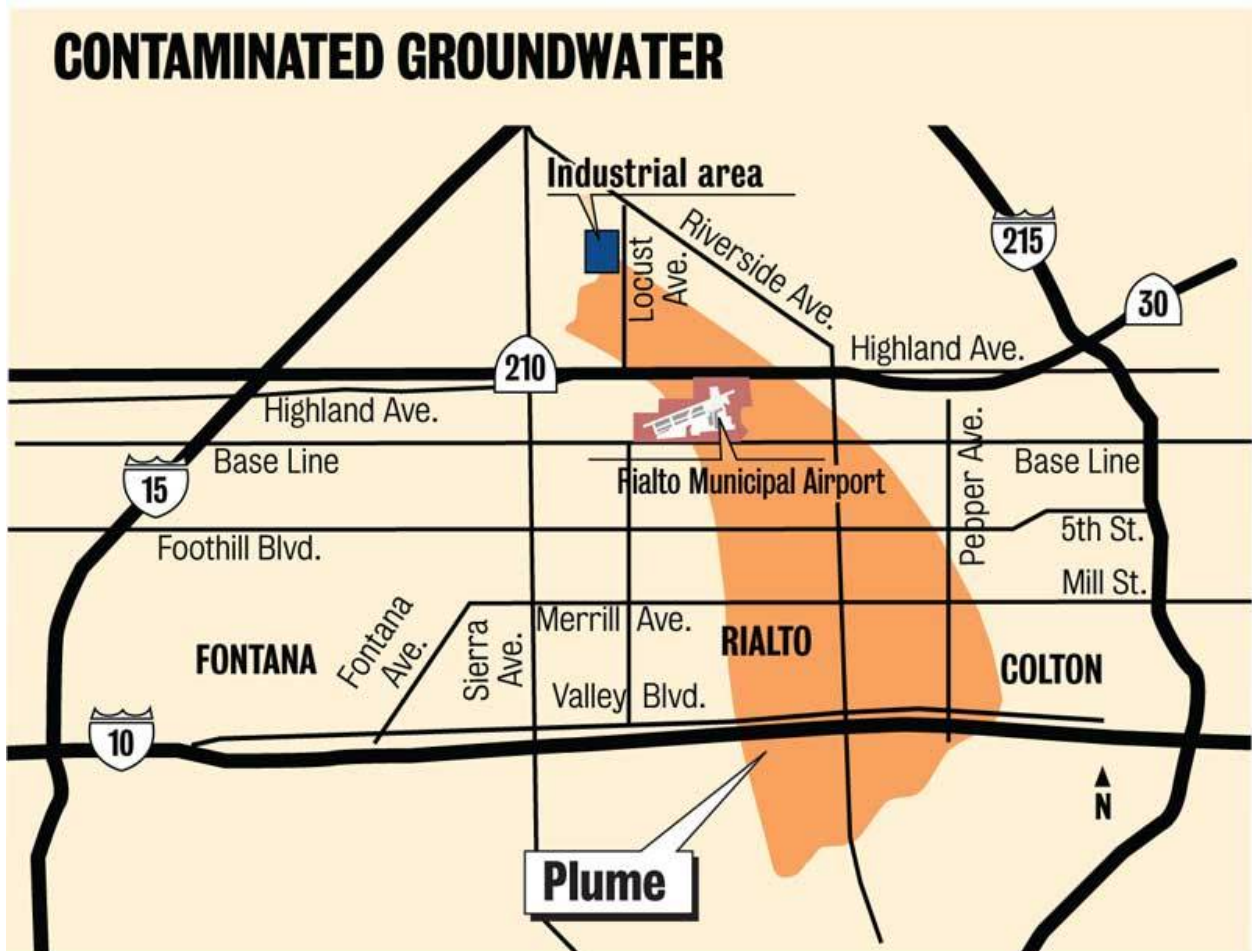
BY JANET ZIMMERMAN

STAFF WRITER

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In response to a push from lawmakers, the State Water Resources Control Board has called a hearing to evaluate progress toward cleaning up widespread perchlorate contamination emanating from a 160-acre industrial site in Rialto.

The four-member board is asking area water agencies, affected communities and users of the land who are responsible for paying for cleanup to present information on legal and technical developments since 2007, when the board last held an evidentiary hearing on the case. The informational hearing will be at 9 a.m. July 17 at the California Environmental Protection Agency headquarters in Sacramento.



STAFF ARTIST

The hearing is the latest move in a long-running dispute over cleanup of groundwater serving Rialto, Colton and Fontana. Perchlorate, an ingredient in fireworks and rocket fuel, and trichloroethylene, a solvent known as TCE, were dumped on the ground or burned in pits for decades beginning in the 1940s and seeped into underground basins.

Perchlorate and TCE are linked to thyroid problems and cancer.

In April, state Sen. Gloria Negrete McLeod, D-Chino, and Senate President Pro-Tem Darrell Steinberg, D-Sacramento, wrote a letter to the board's executive director, Thomas Howard, urging him to hold a meeting to resolve the issue. They cited \$300 million in attorneys' fees that have been spent on the case over the years. That is more than the \$18 million cost to pump and clean the water, as proposed by the federal EPA.

The lawmakers' request moved the issue up on the calendar, Judie Panneton, a water board spokeswoman, said Friday, June 1.

The board wants input on whether to resume evidentiary hearings in the case and whether other potential responsible parties should be added to the proceeding.

A tentative settlement is pending in a lawsuit filed by the cities of Rialto and Colton. Settling parties include Emhart Industries, a subsidiary of Black and Decker; Pyro Spectaculars, a Rialto fireworks company; and San Bernardino County, which operates the Mid Valley Sanitary Landfill. Another potential responsible party, B.F. Goodrich Corp., has indicated it will go to trial rather than pay a settlement.

Residents who have Rialto city water service have been paying an \$8- to \$12-per-month surcharge on their bills for more than seven years. The surcharge raises about \$1.8 million per year, which goes to attorneys' fees, city officials said.

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