



Judge dismisses perchlorate actions at request of Colton, Rialto, San Bernardino County governments

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The Press-Enterprise

A federal judge signed an order dismissing legal actions pertaining to water contamination in the Rialto-Colton Groundwater Basin while local governments continue their efforts to broker a settlement with the alleged polluters.

U.S. District Court Judge Philip Gutierrez took the action on the request of the cities of Rialto and Colton, along with San Bernardino County, to dismiss without prejudice the lawsuits filed against dozens of companies and government agencies that may be responsible for tainting the underground water supply with the chemical perchlorate.

The judge signed the order on Friday in the court's Central District, which includes San Bernardino County. The "without prejudice" distinction allows the cities and county to refile their lawsuits within a year if they can't reach a settlement acceptable to all sides.

The plaintiffs asked Gutierrez for a dismissal so they could reduce their expenses on attorney's fees and court costs while they try to negotiate a solution in which they could recoup the costs of cleaning their contaminated water supply.

The perchlorate-tainted plume spreads in the groundwater basin at a rate of six feet per day, contaminating about 360 million gallons of Rialto's drinking water each month. Perchlorate prevents the thyroid gland from absorbing iodine, and is believed to affect fetuses.

It costs the city of Rialto \$500,000 each year to operate and maintain perchlorate-removal equipment on each of its water wells. The perchlorate pollution is believed to have occurred at a 160-acre industrial site in northern Rialto.

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