



Enforcement News

San Diego Water Board announces completion of soil, groundwater cleanup at Mission Valley Terminal

Almost 2 million pounds of contamination from fuel releases removed

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SAN DIEGO – After decades of efforts to clean up soil and groundwater contaminated by petroleum releases from the Mission Valley Terminal, a 10.5-acre above-ground fuel storage and distribution facility, the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board today notified the dischargers, Kinder Morgan Energy Partners, that the petroleum removal was successful and no further actions are necessary.

Releases from the tanks and distribution operations in Murphy Canyon polluted groundwater in the 1980s, then migrated beneath the parking lot of the former Qualcomm Stadium and the San Diego River, potentially impacting water quality within a one-mile radius and threatening human health and safety. The petroleum contaminants were discovered in groundwater monitoring wells in 1992.

In response to the volume of the petroleum discharges – among the largest ever in California – the San Diego Water Board issued a Cleanup and Abatement Order in 1992, requiring Kinder Morgan Energy Partners to remediate the groundwater and restore water quality. Additionally, staff consulted renowned national experts for guidance in reviewing the work plans and reports to ensure adequate progress was made and cleanup goals were met.

“Cleaning up and restoring the Mission Valley Aquifer for beneficial use and to protect and expand our local water supplies has long been among our top priorities,” said David Gibson, executive officer for the regional board. “Today is a milestone for these efforts. This groundwater basin is a critical resource as San Diego adapts to climate change and hotter, drier conditions.”

The corrective actions, which began in 2005, resulted in removal of almost 2 million pounds of contamination and included the following:

- Installation and operation of 192 soil vapor extraction wells and 19 groundwater extraction wells to treat polluted soil and groundwater. The treatment system processed 1.26 million gallons of contaminated water per day at the peak of its operation.



- A hydraulic containment barrier at the property boundary to contain the groundwater contamination to the terminal property.
- Implementation of a comprehensive monitoring and reporting program to optimize petroleum cleanup and evaluate whether the cleanup system was capable of meeting the remedial goals by the deadline.

In September 2022, the board determined the cleanup and abatement of the petroleum at the terminal and off-site resulted in conditions that are: (1) protective of beneficial uses for groundwater; (2) consistent with the maximum benefit to the people of the state of California; (3) in compliance with the order. Therefore, no further actions are necessary.

“Cleaning up the contamination of the Mission Valley Aquifer is a remarkable achievement,” said Rob Hutsel, president of the San Diego River Park Foundation. “We applaud all parties that worked for so many years to rid the San Diego River and the community of this pollution.”

The city of San Diego, which has studied the viability of the Mission Valley Aquifer as a source of drinking water, plans to use the aquifer for groundwater storage and production as part of its groundwater management program.

The San Diego region stretches 85 miles of scenic coastline from Laguna Beach to the Mexican border and 50 miles inland to the crest of the coastal mountain range. The mild climate enables local residents and tourists to enjoy its many water-related activities. However, the semi-arid region imports about 90 percent of its water supply from Northern California and the Colorado River.