

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN FRANCISCO BAY REGION

STAFF SUMMARY REPORT (Roger Papler)
MEETING DATE: February 9, 2011

ITEM: 7

SUBJECT: **Status Report on Dry Cleaner Spills**

CHRONOLOGY: The Board has not previously considered this item.

DISCUSSION: Solvent spills and releases from dry cleaning operations pose a significant threat to human health and our drinking water supplies, and dry cleaner sites that have had discharges to groundwater are becoming a larger part of the Board's Site Cleanup Program. However, current regulatory programs and funding mechanisms are inadequate to fully address this threat. Without more secure funding sources, such as a statewide fund, the significance of this threat will increase. This issue is discussed more in the Appendix (Dry Cleaner Status Report); below is a synopsis.

Tetrachloroethene (PCE) is the most commonly used dry cleaning solvent. PCE is a highly toxic chlorinated solvent and is classified as a probable carcinogen. PCE exceeds the safe drinking water level in 429 water supply wells in California, and was detected in 17 public water supply wells in Santa Clara County between 1986 and 2003.

Besides dry cleaner spills' long-recognized threat to groundwater, we now recognize that the spills pose a significant potential threat to human health through inhalation of PCE vapors. After PCE is spilled or released to soil, a portion of it vaporizes to form a soil gas plume around the source area and above the groundwater pollution plume. Vapors may then migrate up through soil, move through cracks in floors or through plumbing conduits, and into buildings. This is known as the vapor intrusion pathway. Investigation of the vapor intrusion pathway is now standard practice as part of most dry cleaner pollution investigations.

The Site Cleanup Program operates under the "polluter pays" principle where the party responsible for the discharge pays for the pollution investigation and cleanup and for our staff oversight costs. The "polluter pays" principle breaks down for many dry cleaner pollution cases because the dry cleaner business cannot afford to perform the pollution investigation or cleanup or reimburse our oversight costs. If a responsible party is unable or unwilling to enroll in our cost recovery program, then we have very few resources to work on the case.

Because of the concerns about the impacts to human health and groundwater from dry cleaner spills and the limited resources to address them, staff at the State and Regional Water Boards, and our sister agency, the Department of

Toxic Substances Control, have formed a Dry Cleaner Workgroup to address dry cleaner pollution. So far, the Workgroup has provided four internal workshops to share information and provide trainings on strategies to address dry cleaner pollution cases. The Workgroup is currently developing a more comprehensive list of strategies for funding dry cleaner pollution investigation and cleanup.

RECOMMEN-
DATION:

This is an information item only, and no action is required.

APPENDIX:

Dry Cleaner Status Report