

U.S. EPA begins perchlorate contamination sampling at residence associated with former Mojave Pyrotechnics, Inc., site in Barstow

Release date: 03/22/2011

<http://yosemite.epa.gov/opa/admpress.nsf/0/22b65108190a27058525785b007ddbee?OpenDocument>

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SAN FRANCISCO – This week, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency began collecting surface and subsurface soil samples to test for perchlorate contamination at the Poplar Street home of the former owner/operator of Mojave Pyrotechnics, Inc., a defunct fireworks manufacturing company that operated on North Yucca Street in the 1980s, in Barstow, California.

“EPA will work with the City of Barstow and the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board to determine how much perchlorate is at this location,” said Jane Diamond, Director of the Superfund Division in EPA’s Pacific Southwest regional office. “Cleanup of contamination at the Poplar Street Site will be based on the outcomes of the March sampling. We expect to have more information by the end of May.”

After receiving information indicating perchlorate had been buried on the property, EPA discovered a white, solid substance in a layer just below the ground surface in a garden area adjacent to the residence. A sample collected from the layer contained perchlorate. The residence is near a private drinking water well that was recently discovered to be contaminated with perchlorate. One of EPA’s goals in this investigation will be to determine whether the site might be a source for perchlorate contamination in the groundwater.

Perchlorate is both a naturally-occurring and man-made chemical used in the manufacture of rocket fuel, fireworks, flares and explosives, and may be present in bleach and in some fertilizers. Perchlorate may disrupt the thyroid’s ability to produce hormones that are critical to developing fetuses and infants.

EPA’s action follows the discovery of elevated levels of perchlorate in Barstow’s drinking water supply by the water purveyor Golden State Water Company (GSWC). The GSWC issued an advisory in November 2010 to not drink water that was in effect for three days. The advisory was lifted after the water purveyor shut down the drinking water well that was contaminating the city’s water supply.