

GROUNDWATER CLEANUP / ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE ISSUES

Editorial: Wyle priority

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It's understandable that neighbors of Wyle Laboratories want the site put on the federal Superfund list, since the EPA found a toxic mess there.

But who's in charge of the cleanup is less vital than removing the contamination - and keeping residents fully informed about the progress.

A Superfund listing might give the site a higher public profile, but pushing for the designation could divert energy from the cleanup. And does it really matter which agency studies the health risks there, as long as the study is thorough and public?

A yearlong Environmental Protection Agency investigation did find pollution at Wyle serious enough to place it on the Superfund list of the nation's worst toxic sites. Yet the EPA won't make Wyle a Superfund site, because the state is already working on testing and cleanup of the soil and groundwater.

The EPA notes that California has a head start on the process and cash to pay for it, because the state has ordered Wyle to cover the cleanup costs. And the EPA would not examine past health effects near the site, even though that's a big concern for nearby residents.

For decades, Wyle tested projects for the defense industry along with rocket engines. Neighbors have long wondered if the pollution from Wyle contributed to their cancers and thyroid disorders, though no direct link has been demonstrated.

Still, residents worry. They want to bring in the big EPA guns because just getting the facts on the pollution has given them headaches, on top of any other ills.

Scientists and regulators must address residents' fears, and site study and cleanup must continue. But whether the state or federal government oversees the process doesn't really matter, as long as it happens.#

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