

MTBE Groundwater Contamination in California Linked To Petroleum Terminals

HOUSTON--June 19, 2002--*Researched by Industrialinfo.com (Industrial Information Resources, Incorporated; Houston, Texas).*

Speaking at the 22nd annual Independent Liquid Terminals Association conference held on June 11th in Houston, James White of White Environmental Associates (Brea, California) released findings related to MTBE contamination in California water supplies.

Many of the problems surrounding public water supply wells contaminated with MTBE are directly linked to petroleum storage terminals and gas stations and may be compounded by the lack of enforcement of California's underground storage tank (UST) requirements. Strengthened UST requirements have been ordered, but some terminal operators have been found to be ignoring orders, disconnecting leak detection and alarm systems and not maintaining proper record keeping.

In one instance, a plume of MTBE managed to travel over one mile into the earth and almost a year passed before clean-up efforts were made. MTBE travels further and deeper than most petroleum products, drastically increasing the cost of clean-up.

Enforcement of UST requirements at the state and federal level is almost non-existent and has lead to an increase in MTBE contamination. Fourteen petroleum terminals in the Los Angeles area, particularly in Santa Barbara County, have been targeted as possible sites leaking MTBE into groundwater and seven terminals in El Dorado County were also under fire.

The South Tahoe Public Utility District is currently seeking tens of millions of dollars in compensation from major oil companies for damages related to the environmental clean-up of MTBE in the area. Some wells in Santa Barbara County are abandoned, destroyed, or in inactive status.

James White stated, "The threat of contamination has been greatly reduced. But now the MTBE issue is on a freight train headed toward an eventual national phase out that will cost consumers billions of dollars in increased fuel costs."

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