

## Contaminated water being treated, discharged

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[Ari Cohn](#), Tribune

Pumping of contaminated groundwater resumed Sunday at a treatment plant in Scottsdale, but the treated water now goes into a Salt River Project canal instead of 12,000 residents' drinking water supply.

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Treatment of water from a well contaminated with suspected carcinogen trichloroethylene, or TCE, at the Miller Road Treatment Facility was suspended in January. The action was taken after Arizona American Water Co., a private utility that provides drinking water to parts of Scottsdale and Paradise Valley, announced a mechanical breakdown had allowed water tainted with four times the allowable level of TCE to enter the company's water supply.

Arizona American had been pumping and treating the contaminated water on behalf of Motorola, one of the companies responsible for polluting groundwater under a vast swath of Scottsdale with TCE, beginning in the mid-1950s. The chemical generally was used as an industrial solvent.

In the wake of the January drinking water incident, Arizona American disconnected the main contaminated well from its system and canceled its contract to pump and treat water for Motorola.

Sheryl Bilbrey, a section chief with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's San Francisco office, said the well remained off line until Sunday. Motorola has contracted with environmental management and engineering firm LFR to resume groundwater treatment at the Miller Road plant, she said.

"Motorola has hired its own operator, approved by the EPA," Bilbrey said. The well remains disconnected from Arizona American's water system, which previously treated the well's water and blended it into its drinking water supply.

LFR, however, now treats the water to federal Clean Water Act standards, and has a permit to pump the treated water into the SRP canal for up to a year, Bilbrey said. Motorola has paid to install a new control panel and alarm systems on the well to prevent a repeat of the January mechanical breakdown that led to the drinking water scare, Bilbrey said.

SRP officials said there are five municipal treatment plants on the canal downstream from the Miller Road facility - two in Phoenix and one each in Tempe, Glendale and Peoria - that treat water for use in their supplies.

Paula Thornton-Greer, Motorola spokeswoman, said LFR has been operating a similar water treatment system in Scottsdale for 10 years without incident. The contract is a temporary measure until a long-term treatment solution can be devised, she said.

Bilbrey said those solutions could include reinjecting the treated water into the underground aquifer, or simply carrying on with pumping it into the canal.

"They could potentially make this permanent. SRP would have to agree," she said.

It was important to get the pumping started again to prevent TCE in the groundwater from spreading farther, she said. The EPA has been monitoring the groundwater since the well was shut off.

"The plume has remained relatively stable," Bilbrey said.