

## Sole Source Aquifer Designations in EPA, Region 9

The U.S. EPA's Sole Source Aquifer Program was established under Section 1424(e) of the U.S. Safe Drinking Water Act (SDWA.) Since 1977, it has been used by communities to help prevent contamination of groundwater from federally-funded projects. It has increased public awareness of the vulnerability of groundwater resources.

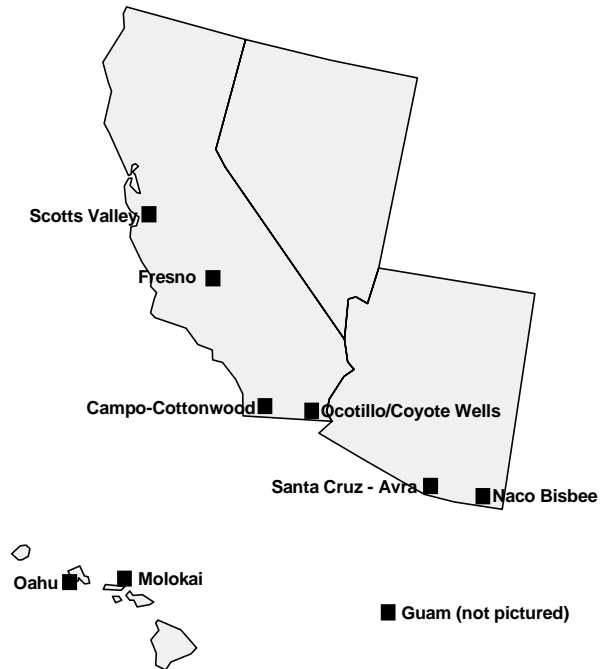
**How did this program start?** SDWA regulations implementing the sole source aquifer statute were first proposed in 1977 for the Edwards Underground Reservoir in San Antonio, Texas. These regulations guided U.S. EPA in the subsequent designation of 64 sole source aquifers across the United States.

**What does the Sole Source Aquifer Program do?** The Sole Source Aquifer program allows for EPA environmental review of any project which is financially assisted by federal grants or federal loan guarantees. These projects are evaluated to determine whether they have the potential to contaminate a sole source aquifer. If there is such a potential, the project should be modified to reduce or eliminate the risk, or federal financial support may be withdrawn. This doesn't mean that the Sole Source Aquifer program can delay or stop development of landfills, roads, publicly owned wastewater treatment works or other facilities. Nor can it impact any direct federal environmental regulatory or remedial programs, such as permit decisions.

The Sole Source Aquifer Program's review authority extends only to projects funded with **federal assistance** that are to be implemented in designated sole source aquifer areas. (For regulations applicable to new private development, you should consult with your local, county or state environmental health agency.)

Typical projects reviewed by the U.S. EPA include housing projects undertaken by Housing and Urban Development, and highway construction and expansion projects undertaken by the Federal Highway Administration. In 1991, the U.S. EPA reviewed 152 federal assistance projects totaling \$571 million; of these projects, 25 had to be modified to prevent contamination of sole source aquifers. Modifications included the redesign of bridges and highways to prevent spills of hazardous materials.

**How do you designate an aquifer as a "Sole Source" Aquifer?** As the name implies, only a "sole source" aquifer can qualify for the program. To be a sole source, the aquifer must supply more than 50% of a community's drinking water. Any individual, corporation, association, or federal, state or



local agency may petition the U.S. EPA for sole source aquifer designation, provided the petition includes sufficient hydrogeologic information. An outline describing how such petitions should be prepared is contained in *The Sole Source Aquifer Designation Petitioner Guidance*, copies of which are available at EPA Regional offices (see contact information below.)

**What about Boundaries?** Determination of sole source aquifer boundaries is a difficult aspect of the designation process since the "designated area includes the surface area above the aquifer and its recharge area." Thus, some sole source aquifers extend across state boundaries. The 10,000 square-mile Eastern Snake River Aquifer, for example, includes portions of Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Wyoming.

In Region 9: nine sole source aquifers have been designated in the following areas as shown on the map: Upper Santa Cruz and Avra Basin Aquifer, covering parts of Pima, Pinal, and Santa Cruz Counties, Arizona; Naco-Bisbee Aquifer, Arizona; Ocotillo-Coyote Wells, Imperial County, California; Fresno Aquifer, California; Scotts Valley Aquifer, Santa Cruz County, California; Campo-Cottonwood Aquifer, San Diego County, California; Northern Guam Aquifer, Guam; Southern Oahu Aquifer, Hawaii; and Molokai Aquifer, Hawaii.

Region 9 SSA maps are on the web at [www.epa.gov/safewater/ssanp.html](http://www.epa.gov/safewater/ssanp.html). For more information about SSA designation and project reviews, please call David Albright, manager of the Ground Water Office, at (415) 972-3971 or email [albright.david@epa.gov](mailto:albright.david@epa.gov).