

# Groundwater Appreciation



**E**very September, Protect Your Groundwater Day rolls around, reminding us of the importance of ensuring we have enough of this critical resource. And even though this year's date has passed, the upcoming National Ground Water Assn.'s Groundwater Expo, happening Dec. 15 to 17, is another good chance to be reminded of groundwater's importance to our water supply.

According to the U.S. Geological Survey, 39.4% of the U.S. population regularly depends on groundwater, and 38.5 million Americans rely on privately owned and operated household water wells for their drinking water supply. Another 87.1 million residents rely on groundwater-supplied community water systems. And with drought plaguing parts of the country, protecting groundwater through conservation is more important now than ever.

But what about the groundwater that was compromised years ago? The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) is trying to stay on top of that with its Office of Legacy Management, which is "committed to managing responsibilities associated with the legacy of World War II and the Cold War," according to the DOE's website. This includes radioactive and chemical waste, environmental contamination and hazardous material at more than 100 sites across the country.

As a part of this initiative, research emerged earlier this year on a strain of bacteria that "breathes" uranium, which may be key in cleaning up polluted groundwater at sites where uranium ore was processed to make nuclear weapons decades ago: After the bacteria interact with uranium compounds in water, the uranium becomes immobile and no longer dissolves in the groundwater—therefore, it can't contaminate drinking water brought to the surface.

According to a news story in Rutgers Today, a team of Rutgers University scientists discovered the bacteria in soil at an old uranium ore mill in Rifle, Colo.—one of nine mills in Colorado used in nuclear weapons production. The discovery was significant because "it was the first known instance in which scientists found a bacterium from a common class known as betaproteobacteria that breathes uranium," the article said. The team is optimistic about the potential for these bacteria to aid in Rifle's groundwater pollution problem—and potentially for similar sites.

At iWWD, we're always eager to learn of and report on new discoveries that could mitigate water pollution, as well as new technologies solving your biggest industrial site wastewater issues. Be sure to send us your ideas for application articles as we roll into 2016.

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