



THIS WEEK: DON'T DRINK THE (PERCHLORATED) WATER

Seen *Why We Fight* yet? You should—it's a scary-as-hell documentary all about the military-industrial complex, and how it's in the best interests of American corporations and defense contractors to make war, because—natch—there's huge money in indiscriminate bloodshed. Netflix it up sometime, and thank us later.

Not covered in the film, though, is the price innocent civilians have had to pay for this endless military buildup. Take the citizens of Rialto, for example. Between 1957 and 1963, Goodrich—you know, the tire and rubber people? The "Goodrich doesn't have a blimp!" folks?—owned and operated a manufacturing plant in Rialto, where they processed rocket fuel meant for Loki, Sidewinder, ASP I and ASP II missiles.

"Whoo-hoo! U-S-A-! U-S-A-!" you say? Sure! Hell, Rialto residents probably felt the same way back then—keepin' 'Merica strong and all. But in 1997, perchlorate contaminants from all that rocket fuel started mysteriously turning up in Rialto's drinking water wells. Perchlorate is nasty, nasty stuff, say numerous environmental groups—even at low levels, the chemical residue can cause behavioral and learning disorders in children. According to depositions given by former Goodrich employees, thousands of pounds of waste rocket fuel were dumped in an unlined pit behind Goodrich's Rialto plant—and that, today, is the source of the perchlorate contamination.

Not much has been done since the initial perchlorate discovery in 1997, certainly not by Goodrich. In early 2003, Goodrich signed an agreement with Rialto, Colton and two IE water districts that stipulated the company would provide \$4 million to help clean up the perchlorated groundwater. The catch: Goodrich

couldn't be sued. Another agreement was eventually entered with Goodrich when the previous one expired, which called for the company to drill monitoring wells. That agreement expires in October.

"[Goodrich] just wound up buying themselves a few years of immunity," says Sujatha Jahagirdar of the LA-based Environment California Research & Policy Center, which three weeks ago released a report that showed a dramatic uptick in perchlorate levels in PW-2, a water well located near Locust and Riverside Avenues, from an April 2005 concentration level of 53 to an April 2006 level of 10,000—a pollution reading more than 5,000 times higher than proposed perchlorate limits.

The drinking water that flows to people's homes in Rialto is safe, and always has been, says city councilman Ed Scott—but that's partially because the city has had to close most of their wells as a precaution.

"We will not serve any water that contains perchlorate, but it's clearly affected us," Scott tells *IE Weekly*. "We had to put a perchlorate fee on everyone's water bill in order to go after, not just Goodrich, but 42 responsible parties that have been involved in this." He adds that the city has collected about \$6 million in cleanup fees in the last three years—but the total cost of the cleanup will wind up costing conservatively around \$200 million.

"All of our water comes from our wells," Scott continues. "Rialto always had very good wells, but we see a time when we may have to go out of the city for our water. Goodrich has a huge responsibility in all this, but they don't care about the community. Their attorney even told me that since they were a defense contractor, they didn't have to care about the community." **IE**