Hinkley will be a “ghost town,” its mayor said. Since Erin Brockovich left Hinkley 17 years ago, about its residents and lone struggling retail business, said Hinkley’s dwindling population, he sees little hope for saving his store.

WHAT’S NEXT?

Hinkley, PG&E and the water board will discuss this month, the nation’s first expected to issue this month, the nation’s first.

WHAT’S NEXT?

The town’s future is at risk again with reports of a spreading toxic water plume. And later in the year, the EPA will begin testing for other contaminants, including chromium-6.

ANOTHER TOWN ‘LOST TO POLLUTION’

Neighbors watch as radioactive George Zimmerman was cleared of all charges in the shooting of Trayvon Martin, the unarmed black teenager who was killed unlawful murder. But the jury of six women, all but one of them white, reached a verdict of not guilty after deliberating only 16 minutes.

FONTANA UNIFIED

Recall campaign makes final push

Editorial: If ever there was proof that what we don't know can hurt us, it's this Trayvon Martin case.

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 recounted his feelings about the not guilty verdict.

I am broken hearted, my faith is

testimony to the media.

Martin’s mother and father were in the courtroom when the verdict was read. Her father, Tracy, responded to the not guilty verdict.

“Lost to pollution” is a description they are faced with reports of a spreading toxic water plume.

When Erin Brockovich left Hinkley 17 years ago, she believed a massive legal settlement against a giant utility company would mean the end of toxic ground water for the small Mojave Desert town. But now, with its only school closed and the population rapidly dwindling, the remaining residents are faced again with reports of a spreading toxic water plume.

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Erin Brockovich is long gone, but there’s been no ‘happily ever after’ for Hinkley

Seventeen years after a groundbreaking settlement that left some of this town’s residents with millions from Pacific Gas & Electric Co., the Hinkley community is on the verge of disappearing.

The town’s residents are rapidly leaving, its only school closed last month and an engineering expert hired to advise the community worries that residents aren’t asking the right questions to preserve the town they love.

The state water agency overseeing the complex cleanup of Hinkley’s toxic water plume is about to consider approval of an environmental review of PG&E’s proposed cleanup methodologies that, among other things, allows for pilot technology to expand into new areas of the plume.

For some residents, it seems like they’re part of some big science project they can’t control.

Approval of that environmental review would mean “a license to poison Hinkley,” said Bobby Morris, who believes large quantities of manganese that turned the water in his backyard pool black last year is related to PG&E’s injection of ethanol in the worst part of the plume.

“That needs to be stopped right now,” said Morris, who recently sold his home to PG&E and relocated with his wife to Pahrump, Nev.

The toxic plume beneath Hinkley is the legacy of 12 years of operations, from 1952 to 1964, when chromium-6, a known carcinogen, at PG&E’s natural gas compressor station was dumped from giant cooling towers into unlined ponds. From there it percolated into the groundwater and into residents’ wells in a community where there is no central water system.

For years, Hinkley residents have expected PG&E to contain the plume made famous in the award-winning 2000 movie “Erin Brockovich.”

But as more monitoring wells are sunk — there are now about 500 — the known boundary of the plume becomes ever larger.

If the 1,000-page EIR is approved, PG&E will be able to expand several pilot cleanup options.

“I walked away assuming that everything was OK, and it wasn’t. I feel duped, ashamed and really sad for the people of Hinkley.”

— Erin Brockovich
SUNDAY, JULY 14, 2013 LOS ANGELES NEWS GROUP

SPECIAL REPORT: HINKLEY’S FUTURE HANGS IN THE BALANCE

“I think I can accomplish more for the Hinkley community working on my own.”

“Too many people from Hinkley are ending up here (in the town’s cemetery).”

DARON BANKS & FAMILY

SAVING FAMILY TIME FOR A CAUSE

Eighteen months ago, Daron Banks made a pact with his wife, Reanna. She would pick up some of his household responsibilities so that he could spend more time on the chromium-6 issue, which has plagued Hinkley for decades.

Banks and his family want to eventually leave Hinkley, but Banks has vowed to hold Pacific Gas & Electric Co. accountable for polluting the town’s water, even of the family moves to another town.

Banks believes his biggest challenge to date is getting the utility company to hire an independent expert to conduct a key study on the chromium-6 problem. The expert is John Dill, a research hydrogeologist with the United States Geological Survey, who has a 20-year background studying the Mojave Desert.

In April, PG&E put the state of California on notice that it plans to study Wells 9 and 10, the water supply for Hinkley, to determine what amount was caused by PG&E’s operating practices.

“I’m going to do everything I can to make sure he can do an independent study,” Banks, 44, said. A previous background study determined that the Hinkley Valley groundwater had a naturally occurring chromium-6 level up to 3.1 parts per billion. But that study was flawed and thrown out.

“Working as a schoolteacher and being in the military, I know how to command attention,” he said.

“Having worked as a schoolteacher and being in the military, I know how to command attention,” he said.

Banks, who had been part of the new leadership of the Hinkley Community Advisory Committee, resigned from the CAC last spring.

“I’m so mad about this. And I’m so sad. My wife is mad at me. The kids are mad at me because I am always saying no (to things they need to buy). You wake up thinking about it.”

“ Too many people from Hinkley are ending up here (in the town’s cemetery).”

ALI ABU HANTASH

HINKLEY’S ONLY STORE STRUGGLES

Two years ago, Ali Abu Hantash thought it was time to follow the American dream and open from, a store manager to owner.

Opening the Hinkley Market & Gas Station fit those parameters well.

There were trips to Dinébiedji with the kids, dinner out a couple times a week and money to buy pretty much anything the children wanted.

But as more homeowners and renters left town over concerns about the changing boundaries of the plume of chromium-6 in their drinking water, sales at his market, which is located north of Highway 58 on Hinkley Road, have plummeted.

“I’m so mad about this. And I’m so sad,” he said. “My wife is mad at me. The kids are mad at me because I am always saying no (to things they need to buy). You wake up thinking about it.”

“Too many people from Hinkley are ending up here (in the town’s cemetery).”
Since Hinkley suit has kept busy pollution fighter utility now owns 2,595 acres in town

Sunday, July 14, 2013

The Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board has ordered PG&E to provide water to Hinkley residents that does not exceed 0.06 parts per billion of total chromium. This applies to both bottled water and a whole-house water replacement system it has developed for Hinkley residents. This is the lowest measurement possible with current technologies. A Los Angeles News Group analysis of store-bought bottled water showed several brands exceeding the standard set by the water board for PG&E, although all were well below the state standard of 50 parts per billion of total chromium and 100 parts per billion set by the EPA.

PG&E has bought 100 Hinkley families living within a mile of the town’s groundwater plume the choice to have PG&E supply their homes with bottled water or new treatment systems or allow PG&E to buy their homes. In the past, only 115 accepted PG&E buyouts — 44 were in service and 71 were in progress — and 10 opted for whole-household water replacement systems custom-built to meet requirements set by the state agency overseeing the water cleanup. After a series of community meetings, PG&E learned that some residents wanted to stay and find a solution to their problem and others...
Chromium is a industrially important metal that has the potential to contaminate drinking water sources. The hexavalent form of chromium, Cr+6, is commonly found at low levels in groundwater in some parts of the country. It can occur naturally but can also enter drinking water sources through discharges from past disposal practices before environmental risks were understood. Hexavalent chromium is considered a potent carcinogen when inhaled and, more recently, scientists have recognized dangers when consumed. Unlike Cr+6, trivalent chromium, which is Cr+3, is an essential nutrient in the human diet.

Cr+6 can be converted into the more benign Cr+3 under certain conditions. Some scientists say that if the discharge of Cr+6 into the Hinkley soil had occurred in some place green, then naturally occurring soil microbes would have converted much of it to Cr+3. But the dry Hinkley environment fosters few microbes able to convert Cr+6 into Cr+3.

These maps show the increase in the number of monitoring wells used to investigate the plume.

Chromium-6 samples, from groundwater monitoring wells, for the first quarter (January through March) of the 2013 monitoring period. Plume outline represents where chromium-6 measurements exceed 3.1 ppb, which has been established as the interim upper background chromium-6 concentration in the Hinkley valley.

Note: Dotted outline represents estimated northern plume area based on PG&E Q1 2013 sampling results.
PG&E’s Hinkley remediation strategy

PG&E has begun remediation activities to clean the groundwater below Hinkley. The cleanup process is overseen by the Lahontan Water Quality Control Board, which is based in South Lake Tahoe.

The utility has three operators who are responsible for controlling the water contamination, including monitoring the location of the plume and its movement.

PG&E and the Water Board have developed the following remediation actions to contain the plume:

- **Groundwater extraction**
  - Contaminated groundwater is pumped to manage flow directions and contain the plume.

- **Groundwater injection**
  - Noncontaminated water is injected at the outer edge of the plume to create a hydraulic barrier to prevent further spreading.

- **Chromium-6 treatment by plants**
  - Mildly contaminated groundwater is passed through the soil and dripped onto grasses used to feed dairy cows. The microbes around the plants’ roots rapidly convert chromium-6 to chromium-3.

- **Subsurface treatment (plume-core only)**
  - Ethanol (a carbon food source) is injected into the plume to promote the growth of naturally occurring microbes, which pump oxygen out of water, setting up chromium-6’s conversion to chromium-3.

- **Accurate monitoring**
  - An extensive network of more than 600 monitoring points is used to track the location of the plume and its movement.

**In-situ Reactive Zone (IRZ) Treatment System**

1. Ethanol is diluted with water and injected into the core of the Cr+6 plume.
2. This stimulates the growth of naturally occurring microbes, which help in the conversion of Cr+6 to Cr+3.
3. Other naturally occurring substances, like iron and sulfur, assist in this conversion process as well.
4. Cr+3 then drops out of the water and almost entirely stays localized in an immobile form.

**PG&E’s Pioneering cleanup techniques**

Utilities see some success in battle against pollution

In recent years, PG&E has taken a number of steps to remediate the plume of toxic, cancer-causing pollutants that has consumed much of this community’s well water sources.

Seventy-five years ago, the plume revealed in an environmental impact statement with 650 residents for $333 million.

PG&E has identified the core of the chromium-plume with a strategy that confers the successful use in World War II’s naval mines—triumphs and failures.

PG&E has noted that all decommissioned naval mines and killing microbes in cooling tower fluids faster than a similar operation would be in a cooler climate, he said. On a tour of PG&E remediation efforts, Sullivan said PG&E plans to track the location of the plume and its movement.

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Gilbert Acosta drives his 1984 Honda three-wheeler just about everywhere.

“I love Hinkley, this is where I grew up,” Terry Burns said. “This is where we raised our family.” They have no plans to leave.

“These neighbors are long gone and the house was demolished as part of the Pacific Gas & Electric Co. buyout program,” he said. The Burns are taking the other option, signing up for the whole household relocation program that PG&E will underwrite for five years. After that, it’s uncertain who maintains and pays for the upkeep.

Living as a squatter on his former property, sold because he couldn’t pay the taxes, makes life tough. He and his wife, Susie, have lived in the town since the 1960s and raised three sons in the community. They have no place to leave.

**TERRY AND SUSIE BURNS**

**THEY WANT TO BUY MORE HINKLEY LAND**

“My biggest worry isn’t about his health. It’s that the new owner of his former house will underwrite for five years. After that, it’s uncertain who maintains and pays for the upkeep.

Terry Burns is a consummate Hinkley resident. He wants to buy property there. Burns and his wife, Susie, have lived in the same house in Hinkley since 1987.

They raised their three sons in the house and have no plans to leave. In fact, Terry Burns has approached Pacific Gas & Electric Co. about selling them the empty lot next door.

These neighbors are long gone and the house was demolished as part of the Pacific Gas & Electric Co. buyout program. The Burns are taking the other option, signing up for the whole household relocation program that PG&E will underwrite for five years. After that, it’s uncertain who maintains and pays for the upkeep.

**GILBERT ACOSTA**

**EARLY EXPOSURE WORRIES EX-MARINE**

“I knew that something was wrong with the water and I knew it was chromium, not just something fishy going on here.”

Black Acosta drives his 1984 Honda three-wheeler just about everywhere. He invested more than $10,000 in time and labor to improve the house. And then chromium—began showing up in his house’s well, dragging the purchase idea down a deep, dark hole.

As kids, he and his brother did a lot of swimming in pools near PG&E’s natural gas compressor station, ground zero for the plume of chromium contamination. Space Communications Complex.

When his father retired from the Army at Fort Bliss, Texas, in 1963, he moved to Hinkley, California. He was a deep, dark hole.

“So I put some water in a bucket and went to catch up with him. He said he needed surgery and has been able to work since then.”

Acosta’s biggest worry isn’t about his health. It’s that the new owner of his former house will underwrite for five years. After that, it’s uncertain who maintains and pays for the upkeep.

Those neighbors are long gone and the house was demolished as part of the Pacific Gas & Electric Co. buyout program. The Burns are taking the other option, signing up for the whole household relocation program that PG&E will underwrite for five years. After that, it’s uncertain who maintains and pays for the upkeep.

Just before the offer was “sweetened.”

“Something isn’t right. There must be something fishy going on here.”

“Then a bulldozer hit me on the head … Something isn’t right. There must be something fishy going on here.”

When he prepared to leave Hinkley, Johnson was among several board members to resign from Hinkley’s Community Advisory Committee, which communicates on behalf of residents on chromium-6 issues with water regulators and PG&E.

Robertita Walker, 59, looks out at her 10-acre property in Hinkley. Walker suspected wrongdoing on PG&E’s part in the early 1990s and sought legal help, which eventually brought Erin Brockovich to Hinkley.

**ROBERTITA WALKER**

**HER RESEARCH WAS THE STARTING POINT**

“We love Hinkley, this is where we grew up,” Terry Burns said. “This is where we raised our family.” They have no plans to leave.

He invested more than $10,000. And then chromium-6 began showing up … dragging the purchase idea down a deep, dark hole.

Armfelt Johnson, 33, a former member of Hinkley’s Community Advisory Committee, moved to Hinkley expecting to buy a house from his wife’s grandmother. Bu PG&E bought the house, and the Johnsons have moved to Barstow.

“I only smoked four days in my life and that was in high school,” he said. He was never exposed to Agent Orange during his brief stint in Vietnam, he said.

In fact, Terry Burns has approached Pacific Gas & Electric Co. about selling them the empty lot next door.

“Something isn’t right. There must be something fishy going on here.”

“When I found out it was chromium-6, I started making copies of water reports.”

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“He invested more than $10,000 in time and labor to improve the house. And then chromium—began showing up in his house’s well, dragging the purchase idea down a deep, dark hole.”

The former Air Force combat veteran came to Hinkley with his family five years ago with the idea of purchasing a house from his wife’s grandmother. They found out it was chromium-6, I started making copies of water reports.”

“Something isn’t right. There must be something fishy going on here.”

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“Something isn’t right. There must be something fishy going on here.”

“I don’t know where I would go.”

USATSI.COM/HINKLEY

**WORRIES EX-MARINE**

**RICHARD JOHNSON**

**VET’S EXIT PLAN MOVES FORWARD**

Richard Johnson is looking forward to a new start — away from Hinkley. The former Air Force combat veteran came to Hinkley with his family five years ago with the idea of purchasing a house from his wife’s grandmother. They found out it was chromium-6, I started making copies of water reports.”

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Hinkley

Hinkley — just how much chromium-6 constitutes risk remains the subject of debate

Science still in flux on threat levels

Just how much chromium-6 constitutes a risk remains the subject of debate.

Special report: Hinkley's future hangs in the balance

Special report: Hinkley’s future hangs in the balance

Health concerns

Chromium primer

What is chromium? A naturally occurring element, chromium exists in various forms and is used in a variety of products.

Chromium-3: safe

Chromium-6: potentially harmful

Chromium-3

Chromium-3 is safe. It is a natural component of the earth’s crust and is a vital nutrient helping the body to metabolize carbohydrates. It also aids in the production of insulin.

Chromium-6

Chromium-6 is much more potent than chromium-3. It occurs naturally in water but is not considered a mineral. It is a carcinogen, and ingestion at high levels can cause cancer.

Research has shown chromium-6 can cause skin irritation and can be cytotoxic to human cells. It can also cause cancer in laboratory animals.

In humans, chromium-6 exposure can cause dermatitis and ulcers. Its long-term effects are unknown. It is highly mutagenic and can cause chromosomal aberrations.

Chromium toxicity

Chromium toxicity in humans is characterized by skin irritation, ulcers and dermatitis. Chromium-6 poisoning has caused severe skin lesions, ulcerations, ulcerations, and necrosis.

In laboratory animals, chromium-6 exposure can cause cancer, dermatitis, ulcers and death. It can also cause respiratory irritation, dermatitis, ulcers and death.

Chromium exposure

Chromium exposure can occur through inhalation, ingestion and dermal contact. Exposure to chromium-6 can occur in the workplace, in the environment and in the home.

Chromium-6 exposure in the environment

Chromium-6 exposure in the environment can occur from industrial activities, mining and coal combustion. It can also occur from household activities, such as using chromium-6 containing paint.

Chromium-6 in the workplace

Chromium-6 exposure in the workplace can occur from handling chromium-6 containing products, such as chromium-6 containing paint and chromium-6 containing jewelry.

Chromium-6 in the home

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Safety

Chromium-6 is a known carcinogen and is listed as a known human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Chromium-3 is not listed as a carcinogen by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

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Chromium-6 in the home

Chromium-6 exposure in the home can occur from using chromium-6 containing products, such as chromium-6 containing paint and chromium-6 containing jewelry.
Investigation into the Truth of the Hinkley Nuclear Plant

Study to settle question of how much chromium-6 is naturally occurring

Despite the polluted water that had flowed from the mouth of the Hinkley Point nuclear power plant to the town of Hinkley for decades, the plant has never been a diligent Hinkley resident for more than a few years. Instead, it has been a story of ongoing debate and political pressure.

The town of Hinkley was once a bustling community, but the arrival of the nuclear power plant in 1952 changed everything. The plant's operation caused water pollution that led to the contamination of the groundwater and surface water in the area.

Hinkley residents, who had built their homes near the plant, were forced to deal with the health risks posed by the chromium-6 contamination. Many of them developed health conditions linked to exposure to chromium-6, and some even died from it.

The town has been under political pressure to address the contamination. In 2010, the United States ramped up its efforts to clean up the contamination, and in 2012, the plant was declared safe to operate.

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