

# STIMULUS CASE STUDY: SAN BERNARDINO COUNTY

## ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION

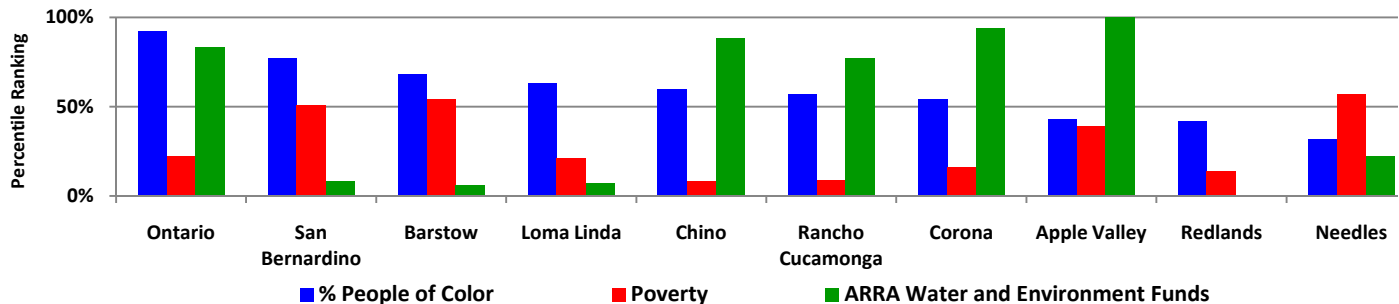
### PROBLEM:

San Bernardino County has been battling dangerous contaminated drinking water systems since 1999.<sup>1</sup> Perchlorate, a by-product of rocket fuel, was found in the groundwater of the Rialto-Colton basins. This in turn has affected agricultural crops where contaminated lettuce has been found to have 100 times more perchlorate than groundwater.<sup>2</sup> The negative health effects of low concentrations of perchlorate can lead to attention deficit disorder, learning disabilities, and decreased IQ in children. More so, high concentrations can lead to thyroid cancer and harm the immune system.<sup>3</sup>

Since groundwater constitutes nearly 80% of the drinking supply in the Inland Empire, residents have been forced to pay a 15% perchlorate surcharge to fund water treatment pursue and legal action towards the responsible parties.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, residents would need to pay higher taxes to receive water from resources outside the county. Consequently, poorer communities who can't afford these additional costs are forced to drink contaminated water.

Water systems that have the highest levels of perchlorate contamination are located in Redlands, Rialto, and the city of San Bernardino.<sup>5</sup> Rialto is ground zero, with perchlorate levels as high as 10,000 parts per billion.<sup>6</sup> West San Bernardino has the highest amount of perchlorate contamination where the maximum level of perchlorate is at 820 parts per billion.<sup>7</sup> As of January 2009, the EPA states safe levels to be at 15 parts per billion. Communities of color disproportionately affected by the toxicity in Rialto (40% people of color with a 12% poverty rate) and the city of San Bernardino (51% people of color with a 19% poverty rate)<sup>8</sup>, create a detrimental need for ARRA funding to develop quality of water and achieving a better quality of life.

### SELECT ARRA WATER AND ENVIRONMENT FUNDS BY CITY



### MORE PROBLEMS:

Efforts to clean up the contamination have been at a standstill. Although the City of Rialto and the West Valley Water District (WVWD) jointly applied for Proposition 84 funds, the Rialto city council dropped their partnership with the WVWD fearing it would sell treated water to cities at huge cost.<sup>9</sup> Despite the WVWD's denial of these charges, this conflict has halted water cleanup efforts. The WVWD would have to forfeit these funds should the city of Rialto break ground without them.

Prop 84 grants will not cover the total costs of the project, ARRA could have provided the necessary funds to overcome current bureaucratic challenges and begin immediate cleanup. However, the city of San Bernardino received very little funding, and Rialto received none. In contrast, water infrastructure and clean-up projects are underway in the Chino Basin, an area composed of 40% people of color and a 3.4% poverty rate.<sup>10</sup>

### SOLUTION:

The 2009 **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA)** promotes environmental protection through public works, and technology projects that supports long-term economic benefits and improved quality of life.

Allocating \$24B federal dollars to Water and Environment Projects illustrates a commitment to promote environmentally safe and sustainable communities.<sup>11</sup> California was awarded **\$1.12B** towards Water and Environment projects, of which San Bernardino County received **\$101M**.<sup>12</sup> Compared to other projects in the county, only 7% of total funds were appropriated for Water and Environment projects; the majority of projects were distributed to improve water and sewer systems, increase fire prevention projects for private lands, and trail restoration. **Despite dedicating \$64M of these funds to water systems, none of them immediately target the water pollution crisis that affects low-income, communities of color in San Bernardino County, specifically in the cities of San Bernardino and Rialto.**

#### FOOTNOTES:

1. City of Rialto Website. [http://www.ci.rialto.ca.us/water\\_index-perchlorate.php](http://www.ci.rialto.ca.us/water_index-perchlorate.php)
2. Renee, S. "Lettuce grown during the winter months may contain higher levels of toxic rocket fuel than is considered safe by the EPA." Environmental Working Group. Apr 2003. Web: <http://www.ewg.org/node/15415>
3. Jahagirdar, S. New Spike in Perchlorate Pollution Threatens Rialto Drinking Water Wells. Environmental California Research and Policy Center. Web: <http://odn.publicinterestnetwork.org/assets/OJokYGFdj1KgmFozROgZMQ/New-Spike-in-Perchlorate-Contamination-White-Paper.pdf>
4. City Council of Rialto Resolution No. 5074 Report. [www.ci.rialto.ca.us/surcharge.pdf](http://www.ci.rialto.ca.us/surcharge.pdf)
5. Rocket Science: Table 1: Perchlorate contamination detected in California water systems. Environmental Working Group. 2002. [www.ewg.org/node/19552](http://www.ewg.org/node/19552)
6. City of Rialto Website. [http://www.ci.rialto.ca.us/perchlorate/water\\_rialto-perchlorate-plan.php](http://www.ci.rialto.ca.us/perchlorate/water_rialto-perchlorate-plan.php)
7. Rocket Science: Table 1: Perchlorate contamination detected in California water systems. Environmental Working Group. 2002. [www.ewg.org/node/19552](http://www.ewg.org/node/19552)
8. American Factfinder
9. Dulaney, Josh. "Allegations hound Rialto water project." San Bernardino County Sun. 12 Jun 2010. Web: [http://findarticles.com/p/news-articles/sun-the-san-bernardino-calif/mi\\_8068/is\\_20100612/allegations-hound-rialto-water-project/ai\\_n54032477/](http://findarticles.com/p/news-articles/sun-the-san-bernardino-calif/mi_8068/is_20100612/allegations-hound-rialto-water-project/ai_n54032477/)
10. American Factfinder
11. Federal Environmental Protection Agency Recovery Website. <http://www.epa.gov/recovery>
12. Federal Recovery Website. <http://www.recovery.org>