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## Freeway plan intersects contaminated water flume

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As Ahwatukee Foothills worries about a proposed freeway's impact on air quality, environmental groups are questioning the intersection of the South Mountain Freeway and one of Arizona's Superfund contamination sites.

The freeway's western leg runs directly above a flume of groundwater contamination that is in some places only 40 to 80 feet below the surface.

The Arizona Department of Environmental Quality is investigating to determine how bad the contamination is and who's responsible for cleaning it up.

And if the Arizona Department of Transportation isn't careful, taxpayers could be left holding the bill.

Known officially as the West Van Buren Water Quality Assurance Revolving Fund Site, it has been identified by the DEQ as one of 35 Superfund sites in Arizona.

The amoeba-like site covers an area from roughly Seventh Avenue on the east, Van Buren Street on the north, 83rd Avenue on the west and Buckeye Road on the south.

State studies have found six different contaminants above regulatory levels, including several industrial solvents.

DEQ wants to finish its investigation by the end of this year.

"There have been impacts to groundwater from these contaminations," DEQ spokesman Cortland Coleman said. "There's no question about that."

He emphasized that drinking water has not been affected. Drinking water that contains some of the chemicals found in the West Van Buren site can cause problems with the liver, kidneys and nervous system, according to the DEQ.

ADOT is also aware of the contamination, spokesman Matt Burdick said.

If the agency doesn't disturb the groundwater supply during the freeway's construction, it won't have to pay for the cleanup, Burdick said.

ADOT announced last month that it will connect the western leg of the proposed \$1.7 billion freeway to I-10 along 55th Avenue. As now planned, the freeway would run at ground level in that area and be elevated over cross streets.

Engineers have studied how deep they will need to dig to install the concrete columns that hold up those bridges, and believe that they can avoid the contaminated water.

"As long as we can avoid penetrating the groundwater, we should not be in a situation where we would have to clean up an environmental hazard," Burdick said.

Such a cleanup would be very expensive. Environmental groups are watching closely to make sure that the state doesn't get stuck with the bill for an industrial mess.

"If the state takes that property to build the freeway, they take responsibility for the cleanup," said Steve Brittle, president of the watchdog group Don't Waste Arizona. "And that means the taxpayers get to pay."

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