



For Immediate Release

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**Groundwater Authority Threatens to Cut Off Water for Only U.S.-Headquartered Company Supplying Vaccine Vials**

*What Happens to the Supply Chain and the Local Community if They Cut Off Searles' Water?*

**Trona, CA** – The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority (Authority) conducted a public hearing Thursday to determine whether to shut off the water supply to Searles Valley Minerals Inc. (Searles) for nonpayment of an exorbitant, unlawful and arbitrary fee that threatens the existence of Searles, a company that has supported the local economy with pioneering technologies and good-paying jobs since its founding in 1873. The Authority ultimately recognized that it didn't have enough information and postponed any decision.

"The Indian Wells Valley Groundwater Authority's board of directors rightly decided that rather than rush forward with a vote, it was wise to take time to better understand how local residents, particularly senior citizens and vulnerable populations who have already been affected by the pandemic and recent earthquakes, could be impacted by a decision to shut off Searles' water supply," said Burnell Blanchard, Vice President of Operations for Searles.

The Authority's discussion on whether to cut off the water supply to Searles as well as residential customers failed to consider the far-reaching consequences the proposed action would have on the impacted communities and the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination effort. Cutting off water to Searles would force the company to shut down immediately as well as cut off the water to the nearly 1,000 domestic customers whose only source of water is the water produced by Searles. Additionally, it would halt Searles' ongoing support of the global COVID-19 vaccination effort. Searles is the only US-headquartered company, and one of only three companies in the world, that produces an ingredient critical to making Type 1 pharmaceutical glass used to make vaccine vials, including COVID-19 vaccine vials.

"The water replenishment fee, which was approved by the Authority in August 2020, is unprecedented, exorbitant and ignores the company's senior water rights. While the Authority has repeatedly claimed that it has attempted to negotiate with Searles, the reality is that every 'solution' offered by the Authority has demanded that the Searles surrender its priority groundwater and legal rights. Payment of the fee would force the company to shut down and leave more than 700 people without jobs, an outcome we will not agree to."

"We look forward to resolving these disputes in the appropriate venue — the courts."

A '[Save Searles](#)' campaign has been in place for several months, representing a coalition of Searles' employees and their families as well as local residents and businesses from the town of Trona and nearby City of Ridgecrest – many of whom live in what the federal government has classified as underserved and severely disadvantaged communities already suffering from economic burdens. As people have learned more about the Authority's proposed actions, the '[Save Searles](#)' campaign has grown.

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