

## **Steelworkers Join Attacks on Aquifer Cleanup Plan in Salt Lake County, Utah**

*Brent Israelsen*. [Knight Ridder Tribune Business News](#). Washington: [Oct 31, 2003](#). pg. 1  
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Oct. 31--Opponents of a plan to pump and treat tainted aquifers in south Salt Lake County have a powerful new ally.

The United Steelworkers of America on Thursday joined a growing number of Utah voices in attacking the cleanup plan for two plumes of groundwater polluted by decades of mining operations at Kennecott Utah Copper Corp.'s Bingham Canyon.

"It would be better to call this a 'pump-and-dump' pollution plan," said Kelly Hanson, Utah representative of the steelworkers union.

Proposed by Kennecott and the state, the "Southwest Jordan Valley Ground Water Cleanup Project" would seek to remediate two "zones" of contaminated groundwater that together cover about 40 square miles of aquifers.

In Zone A, beneath Copperton and Herriman, Kennecott would pump water and strain it through membrane filters in a process known as reverse osmosis. The purified water would be delivered to the Jordan Valley Water Conservancy District for use by its culinary customers. The contaminants, which include acids and sulfates, would be slurried to Kennecott's enormous tailings impoundment near Magna.

In Zone B, below South Jordan, Jordan Valley would pump and treat the water in a reverse-osmosis plant near 8100 South and 1300 West. The contaminants, which include salts and a heavy metal known as selenium, would be discharged into the Jordan River near 2100 South.

United Steelworkers believes that taking pollution from one part of the environment and disposing of it in another "makes no sense," said Diane Heminway, the union's New York-based environmental coordinator.

In protesting the plan, the union -- which has been highly critical of Kennecott's parent company, Rio Tinto, for labor, human rights and environmental violations around the world -- joins forces with environmental groups, duck hunters, owners of private land near the Great Salt Lake, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Salt Lake City Public Utilities Department.

Utah's director of environmental quality, Dianne Nielson -- who also is trustee over the "natural resource damage claim" that is the impetus for the cleanup plan -- said she is taking the public's concerns seriously.

"I have the power [as trustee] to say this is not acceptable and must be changed before I will approve the agreement," Nielson said. "This seems to be a concern worthy of consideration and that's what I'm trying to provide right now."

Originally open until Oct. 2, a public comment period has been extended twice. The new deadline is Nov. 21.

Utah's Water Quality Board also could reverse a water pollution discharge permit issued to Jordan Valley for the project.

Today, the board will consider an appeal of the permit by Friends of Great Salt Lake, an environmental group.

Meanwhile, in southwestern Salt Lake County, some well owners worry the pumping plan will leave their wells high and dry.