



- 0. TONS OF CHROME 6 - Story Preface
- 1. DEATH & DESTRUCTION IN MOJAVE
- 2. MISLEADING STATEMENTS
- 3. 22 YEARS LATE
- 4. THE COMPRESSOR STATION
- 5. TONS OF CHROME 6**
- 6. PG&E POISONS THE GROUNDWATER
- 7. DECEPTION REIGNS
- 8. SEVENTY-SEVEN PLAINTIFFS SUE
- 9. THE BATTLE
- 10. PG&E IS IN TROUBLE
- 11. TRIAL AND SETTLEMENT

Hexavalent chromium (Chromium VI), a cancer-causing chemical used by Pacific Gas & Electric Company in Hinkley, poisoned the groundwater of the company's neighbors. Years later, investigators pieced together that tons of the chemical had been dumped into unlined ponds. This image depicts how chemical-containing wastewater begins its contaminating path into the local environment.

In the flyer PG&E distributed to neighbors of the compressor station, the company talks about adding chromium to the cooling process:

Small amounts of chromium were commonly added by industries to cooling towers to prevent corrosion and scaling.

"Small amounts" wouldn't cause neighbors who owned ranches and dairy farms to worry much. But here is how the plaintiffs' trial brief describes actual amounts used by PG&E:

By 1966 an estimated 65 tons of chromate-based corrosion inhibitors were discharged into the unlined ponds

while the Sun's High Desert Bureau relates what those levels actually meant to the people breathing the air and ingesting the water:

A biochemist said concentrations of highly toxic chromium VI in the groundwater basin reached peak levels of 1,000 to 5,000 times the safe limit for drinking water and more than 50,000 times the safe level for inhalation.

PG&E didn't line the ponds until 1972. The company sent 750,000 additional gallons of chrome 6 wastewater every month to the ponds for another six years.

Once the toxic material was in the unlined ponds, there was nothing to stop it from migrating to the wells that supplied nearby homes, farms and ranches.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/TONS-OF-CHROME-6-Erin-Brockovich>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/TONS-OF-CHROME-6-Erin-Brockovich>



Hexavalent Chromium in the Wastewater

Hexavalent Chromium in the Wastewater, PG&E used hexavalent chromium as part of its operations at the Hinkley natural-gas compressor station, Wikimedia Commons, US EPAView this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Hexavalent-Chromium-in-the-Wastewater>



Lining Waste Ponds

Image online, courtesy [Site Fabric website](#).

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