



Nuestra Casa

# *Water Justice*

FOR EAST PALO ALTO

**Rosa Nelson - Water Justice Program  
Coordinator**







## MISSION

We exist to uplift Latino families in East Palo Alto and the mid-peninsula through community education, leadership development, and advocacy



## VISION

Nuestra Casa envisions a vibrant mid-peninsula community united around shared values, where every resident thrives—no matter where he or she lives.



# HISTORY OF WATER IN EAST PALO ALTO

- Water quality and access is a pervasive issue in East Palo Alto (EPA). This water crisis is a result of historic racial, economic, and political factors and a lack of city incorporation prior to 1983.
- Historically, the community of EPA was not included in important land use and water-allocation decisions that were being made by their neighbors.
- Today EPA is served by three separate water utility companies: Palo Alto Mutual, Veolia, and O'Connor Tract. Palo Alto Mutual and O'Connor Tract are both small, privately-owned, water co-ops.

# CURRENT WATER QUALITY ISSUES



- Residents report many quality issues: brown or gray tap water, a foul odor, and itching/burning skin after showering.
- Residents report confusing water bills and high water rates. Palo Alto Mutual is in the top 20% of residential households with debt burden in California.
- Aging water infrastructure in East Palo Alto - due to a lack of investment.

Palo Alto Mutual Well 5- Rust on Above Ground Features.

# CURRENT WATER QUALITY ISSUES

## **Palo Alto Mutual**

Out of compliance for aluminum, a secondary maximum contaminant level (MCL), from 2018-22. Recent violations for aluminum, 123-TCP, E coli, iron, coliform, manganese.

## **O'Connor Tract**

Ongoing exceedance of the secondary MCL for manganese. Manganese concentrations above the standard give water a black to brown color, cause black staining, and a bitter metallic taste.



Palo Alto Mutual Well 7. Rust on above ground features

## **BAY AREA DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES AND TRIBES WATER NEEDS ASSESMENT PROGRAM**

- In response to growing community concerns about water quality, Nuestra Casa joined the Bay Area Disadvantaged Communities and Tribes Water Needs Assessment Program.
- Nuestra Casa received funding from this grant allowing us to test a total of 53 residential/commercial buildings in East Palo Alto.
- Our tap water testing goals are to inform our community about the safety of their water and collect data to determine if the source of contaminants is the water or premise plumbing.



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# RESULTS



- There were no MCL exceedances found in initial testing. However, public health goal (PHG) exceedances were found. Chloroform and other disinfection byproducts routinely surpassed the PHG.
- We found heavy metals present (Cu, Ba, Al) in tap water. All within California regulatory limits. This may point to pipe corrosion and outdated infrastructure, and could be a factor in diminished water quality.
- No Arsenic or Coliform were found. Lead was found in one residence. The lead level was below the action level (15ppb in CA) but above the California PHG.

Tap Water from one of our EPA residents

# COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- We share all the tap water testing results with the wonderful community members who participated as soon as we receive them from Simple Lab .
- Calling and offering to have a sit down one on one with our water program coordinator.
- Offering low cost filter recommendations to our community that were recommended to us by our partners at Simple Lab and the SF Estuary
- Organizing a possible workshop from a toxicologist in partnership with the SF Estuary
- Our community has been very receptive to our findings and has been very interested in next steps towards securing equitable access to clean water.



## NEXT STEPS

- Creating a Community Water Task Force where we can co-learn on how to address and innovate to solve our local issues.
- Working with our Community Water Task Force to investigate forming a type of water coalition at the city level or a consolidation effort of the mutuals.
- Applying for funding resources available to support further investigation in whether the infrastructure issues are the result of premise plumbing or city plumbing.
- Once we better understand what is causing the issues, researching State Revolving Fund and other major financing available to support updating equipment and connecting either homeowners, landlords, or key city officials to these resources





## CONTACT

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**Water Justice Program Coordinator**

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