



GREAT BASIN UNIFIED AIR POLLUTION CONTROL DISTRICT

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For Immediate Release:

Iranian Scientists Visit Owens Lake

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A State Department-sponsored tour brought a delegation of twelve scientists to the US from Iran to consult with their counterparts on issues related to water shortages in the southwest US. Researchers from Iranian universities with backgrounds in civil engineering, hydrology, geochemistry and environmental sciences were hosted by staff from the Great Basin Unified Air Pollution Control District and LA Department of Water and Power for a tour and workshop at Owens Lake.

Water that once flowed to Lake Urmia in Iran has been diverted to support agriculture and urban populations that have a water demand larger than can be sustained by the available resources. This has caused the drying up of Lake Urmia, a terminal lake with no outlet that once covered 2,000 square miles. It now contains only about 5% of its former volume. Like Owens Lake, the lake bed is exposed to wind erosion causing enormous dust storms.

Lake Urmia dust storms have caused extremely high air pollution levels affecting the health of over 20 million people. The Iranian scientists were highly impressed with the air district's automated air monitoring instruments and modeling system at Owens Lake, which has been acknowledged by researchers as the most advanced system used anywhere in the world. They were also very interested in DWP's dust control measures at Owens Lake, because some of these methods could be utilized at Lake Urmia. Dust mitigation efforts at Owens Lake have been implemented over the last 15 years and are now about 95% complete, while dust control efforts at Lake Urmia have not been initiated.

Air Pollution Control Officer, Phill Kiddoo said, "At almost 20 times the size of Owens Lake, the health risk associated with wind-blown dust from the recently dried Lake Urmia, poses a significant health risk to millions of Iranians. Sharing the information and knowledge gained from decades of research, air quality monitoring and operation of the District's Owens Lake Dust Identification Program in conjunction with showing DWP's successful dust control projects, provided powerful insight to the visiting scientists who are seeking feasible solutions to solve similar water shortage and dust problems at Lake Urmia."

To help them understand the water shortage problems in the US, the Iranian delegation also met with experts at the Salton Sea, Mono Lake, Walker Lake in Nevada, and the Great Salt Lake in Utah. Most of them were making their first trip to the US. While in the Eastern Sierra they stayed three nights in Bishop for the tour that took place in late June.

Photo 1: Nik Barbieri explains the operation of the air district's Owens Lake dust monitoring program to the visiting Iranian scientists.

Photo 2: Dr. Jack Gillies from the Desert Research Institute describes how dust from the Keeler Dunes is controlled using straw bales to reduce the wind until planted native shrubs reach maturity.

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