



Making Central Valley Drinking Water Safe New Water Quality Regulations

The Problem – Unsafe Water

Many communities in the Central Valley have unsafe drinking water supplies as a result of groundwater contamination. The groundwater is polluted by fertilizers, farm animal waste, and aging septic tanks. These pollutants often have salts, nitrates, pesticides, heavy metals, and organisms that can cause disease. As a result, water from many private and domestic wells do not meet State safe drinking water standards.

What is the impact of contamination?

Current regulations do not address the need for safe drinking water in communities where groundwater is contaminated with nitrate and salts. Nitrates are a major cause of unsafe drinking water in the Central Valley. Nitrate comes from fertilizers, aging septic systems, animal feedlots, industrial waste and food processing waste. Many private and domestic wells are contaminated with nitrates. Drinking water with high levels of nitrate can create a health risk, especially to infants and pregnant women. Salt is another pollutant in the groundwater. Over the years, through agricultural, municipal, and industrial practices, salt has accumulated in the groundwater. High salt (salinity) levels can affect the ability to grow crops and also poses a threat to the region's economy. About 1.5 million acres of land have high salinity levels. 250,000 acres are no longer useable for crop production.

What is being done?

Changes in regulations are needed to address this complex problem. A coalition of dischargers (growers, dairies, and municipalities), regulators (government agencies), environmental justice groups, and the Central Valley Regional Water Board (Regional Board) have formed the Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS). The purpose of CV-SALTS is to develop a workable, comprehensive plan for managing salts and nitrate in a consistent and sustainable manner. Over the last few years, CV-SALTS used scientific studies to develop the Salt and Nitrate Management Plan (SNMP).

What is goal of the SNMP?



The top priority of the new regulations in the SNMP is to provide safe drinking water supplies, while improving water quality by reducing salts and nitrates, and, where possible, restoring groundwater.

Progress

As a result, in 2018, the Regional Water Board will put into effect new regulatory options to address the nitrate entering the groundwater in areas with high nitrate levels. These areas include: Kaweah, Turlock, Chowchilla, Tule, Modesto, and Kings groundwater sub-basins and basins.

How can I learn more about CV-SALTS?

You are encouraged to participate and get involved now. For more information, visit www.cvsalinity.org.