



Making Central Valley Drinking Water Safe

New Water Quality Regulations

The Problem – Unsafe Drinking Water

Many communities in the Central Valley rely on groundwater as their primary source of drinking water. Over time, pollutants from agricultural, municipal, and industrial wastewater have contaminated the groundwater in some areas. Pollutants can include salts, nitrates, pesticides, heavy metals, and organisms that can cause disease. As a result, drinking water from many public and private wells does not meet State standards.

What is the Impact of Contamination?

Nitrates are a major cause of unsafe drinking water in the Central Valley. Nitrates seep slowly into the groundwater from fertilizers or after being discharged as wastewater from animal feedlots, industrial facilities, municipal wastewater plants, or leaky septic systems.

Drinking water with high levels of nitrate can create a health risk, especially to infants and pregnant women. Because nitrates have been getting into the groundwater over the last few decades, nitrate levels in some drinking water supplies have increased to unhealthy levels.

Salt is another pollutant that has, over time, gotten into the groundwater from agricultural, municipal, and industrial practices. Also, some areas of the Central Valley have naturally occurring high salt levels. High salt levels in water and soils can reduce crop production.

Progress is Being Made

Changes in regulations are needed to address the complex nitrate and salt problem. Current regulations do not address the need for safe drinking water in communities where groundwater is contaminated with nitrates and salts.



A group of dischargers, representing growers, dairies, industries, and local communities, regulators from government agencies, environmental organizations, and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) formed the Central Valley Salinity Alternatives for Long-Term Sustainability (CV-SALTS). The goals of the CV-SALTS program are to:

1. manage salts and nitrates to provide safe drinking water,
2. bring the impacts of salt and nitrates to the groundwater into balance, and
3. where possible, restore groundwater quality.

To meet these goals, using scientific studies, CV-SALTS developed the 2017 Salt and Nitrate Management Plan (SNMP). The SNMP proposes new, more locally flexible regulations for nitrates and salts. Once the new regulations are adopted in 2018, they will be implemented first in high-priority areas that 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.