



Making Central Valley Drinking Water Safe

New Water Quality Regulations

The Challenge: Unsafe Drinking Water Supplies in Parts of the Central Valley

In 2012, California established access to clean, safe drinking water as a legal right through the Human Right to Water Bill (AB 685). Some areas of the Central Valley do not yet have safe drinking water supplies. Not having safe drinking water, whether from private wells or from a public water system, is an urgent problem, particularly in rural, low-income, disadvantaged communities.

Pollutants in the Groundwater

Wastewater carrying pollutants can be released into a river, a lake, or the soil where it seeps or moves slowly into the groundwater below the ground. At high enough concentrations, the pollutants can make groundwater supplies unusable for drinking water and, in some cases, for agricultural use.

Wastewater is water that has been used. It can come from your home (old, leaky septic tank), agriculture (fertilizer and manure), industries (such as food processing), or cities (public sewer system), and from surface or stormwater runoff. It can contain pollutants like salts, nitrates, pesticides, heavy metals, and organisms that can cause disease.

Nitrates that get into the groundwater are a major cause of the unsafe drinking water. For example, when fertilizer containing nitrates is applied to crops, not all nutrients in the fertilizer are absorbed by the plants. The excess nutrients then seep into groundwater supplies as nitrates.

Salt is another pollutant that has gotten into the groundwater. Over the years, agricultural, municipal, and industrial practices have all contributed salt to groundwater. Also, some areas of the Central Valley have naturally



occurring high salt levels. High salt levels in water and soils can reduce crop production.

Who is Responsible for Water Quality?

Agricultural, municipal, and industrial facilities and households are all responsible for managing pollutants. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) are responsible for regulating water quality for nitrates and salts from agricultural, municipal, and industrial facilities.

Drinking water is provided by many different organizations, from large city systems and water districts to small community water systems. Private household wells are also an important source of water. Many small, disadvantaged communities where residents struggle to afford their water bills or rely on private wells do not have the money to pay for needed upgrades, regular maintenance, and improved treatment operations. In these same communities, residents are also having to buy bottled water or other safe drinking water supplies.

Current regulations for pollution discharges do not reasonably or effectively address the need for safe drinking water. More effort is needed to provide safe drinking water while preventing and cleaning up pollutants.



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CV-SALTS Addresses Salts and Nitrates in Groundwater

In the Central Valley, the State of California and dischargers are working together to find solutions for unsafe drinking water. One solution is the CV-SALTS program. The CV-SALTS program is a group of state and federal regulatory agencies, growers, dairies, industries, municipalities, and environmental interests that have been working together to find better ways to regulate nitrates and salts in the Central Valley.

In January 2017, CV-SALTS released the *Salt and Nitrate Management Plan* (SNMP). It includes changes to the regulations for nitrates and salts. The new regulations address the need for safe drinking water, while at the same time, balancing environmental and economic sustainability by offering more flexible local options for controlling nitrate discharges and cleaning up groundwater.

In late 2018, the Regional Board will implement the new regulatory options in areas with high concentrations of nitrates in the ground water. These high-priority areas are in the Kaweah, Turlock, Chowchilla, Tule, Modesto, and Kings sub-basins and basins.

Learn More About CV-SALTS, Help Shape Your Future

You are encouraged to participate and get involved now. To learn more, visit CV-SALTS at www.cvsalinity.org. CV-SALTS is just one avenue working to ensure safe drinking water supplies for everyone in the Central Valley.

To learn more about funding and technical assistance for small community water systems and disadvantaged communities, visit:

https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/sustainable_water_solutions/#funding.

Programs Supporting Safe Drinking Water for Disadvantaged Communities

The State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) has programs that support access to safe drinking water supplies and help offset the cost of buying water. Depending on the program, the State Water Board offers technical and financial assistance (loans and/or grants) for smaller community water systems and residents located in disadvantaged communities.

- In 2016, funds (from the State's Cleanup and Abatement Fund Account) were allocated for the **Interim Emergency Drinking Water program** to address drought-related drinking water emergencies and provide interim emergency drinking water to disadvantaged communities with a contaminated water supply.
- The State Water Board Division of Financial Assistance **Office of Sustainable Water Solutions** offers funding and technical assistance to disadvantaged communities through three funds: The Drinking Water State Revolving Fund, Clean Water State Revolving Fund, and Proposition 1 bond funds.