



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 because the groundwater contamination. Pollutants from agricultural, municipal, and industrial wastewater seeps into the groundwater over time and contaminates it. The pollutants can include salts, nitrates, pesticides, heavy metals, and organisms that can cause disease. As a result, water from many public and private drinking water wells does not meet State safe drinking water 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 aging 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, the nitrate levels in some drinking water supplies have increased to unhealthy levels.

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.

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 purpose of CV-SALTS is to develop a workable, comprehensive plan for managing salts and nitrate to provide safe drinking water, bring the impacts of salt and nitrates to the groundwater into balance, and, over time, restore, where possible, groundwater quality. Over the last few years, CV-SALTS used scientific studies to develop the 2017 Salt and Nitrate Management Plan (SNMP). The SNMP proposes new regulations to meet the three goals noted above.

Once the new SNMP regulations are adopted in 2018, high-priority areas will be addressed first. 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.