



# Addressing Central Valley Drinking Water Quality

## New Groundwater Quality Regulations

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

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 contaminants 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 contaminants can make groundwater supplies unusable for drinking water and, in some cases, for agricultural use.

Wastewater is water discharged from your home (sewer or septic tank), agriculture (farms and dairies), industries (such as food processing), or cities (public sewer system), and from surface or stormwater runoff. It can contain contaminants including 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 Regulating Water Quality?

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

Drinking water in the Central Valley is provided in several ways—large city systems, water districts, small community water systems, and private household wells. In areas where groundwater has high nitrate levels, the cost of treatment systems and maintenance can be high, particularly for small systems and private wells. In many small, disadvantaged communities, residents struggle to pay high water bills or the high cost of water treatment requires residents to purchase bottled or tanked water.

Current regulations for nitrates and salts do not adequately address the need for safe drinking water. More effort is needed to provide safe drinking water in communities affected by nitrates, while preventing and cleaning up contaminants.



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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.

## 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.

## 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](http://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](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/grants_loans/sustainable_water_solutions/#funding).