

WATER QUALITY CONTROL POLICY  
on the  
USE and DISPOSAL of INLAND WATERS  
USED for POWERPLANT COOLING

ADOPTED JUNE 19, 1975

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CALIFORNIA STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD  
RESOLUTION NO. 75-58

WATER QUALITY CONTROL POLICY ON THE USE  
AND DISPOSAL OF INLAND WATERS USED FOR  
POWERPLANT COOLING

WHEREAS:

1. Basin Planning conducted by the State Board has shown that there is presently no available water for new allocations in some basins.
2. Projected future water demands, when compared to existing developed water supplies, indicate that general freshwater shortages will occur in many areas of the State prior to the year 2000.
3. The improper disposal of powerplant cooling waters may have an adverse impact on the quality of inland surface and groundwaters.
4. It is believed that further development of water in the Central Valley will reduce the quantity of water available to meet Delta outflow requirements and protect Delta water quality standards.

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that

1. The Board hereby adopts the "Water Quality Control Policy on the Use and Disposal of Inland Waters Used for Powerplant Cooling".
2. The Board hereby directs all affected California Regional Water Quality Control Boards to implement the applicable provisions of the policy.
3. The Board hereby directs staff to coordinate closely with the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission and other involved state and local agencies as this policy is implemented.

CERTIFICATION

The undersigned, Executive Officer of the State Water Resources Control Board, does hereby certify that the forgoing is a full, true, and correct copy of a resolution duly and regularly adopted at a meeting of the State Water Resources Control Board held on June 19, 1975.

Bill B. Dendy  
Executive Officer

WATER QUALITY CONTROL POLICY  
ON THE USE AND DISPOSAL OF INLAND  
WATERS USED FOR POWERPLANT COOLING

Introduction

The purpose of this policy is to provide consistent statewide water quality principles and guidance for adoption of discharge requirements, and implementation actions for powerplants which depend upon inland waters for cooling. In addition, this policy should be particularly useful in guiding planning of new power generating facilities so as to protect beneficial uses of the State's water resources and to keep the consumptive use of freshwater for powerplant cooling to that minimally essential for the welfare of the citizens of the State.

This policy has been prepared to be consistent with federal, state, and local planning and regulatory statutes, the Warren-Alquist State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Act, Water Code Section 237 and the Waste Water Reuse Law of 1974.

Section 25216.3 of the Warren-Alquist Act states:

“(a) The commission shall compile relevant local, regional, state, and federal land use, public safety, environmental, and other standards to be met in designing, siting, and operating facilities in the State: except as provided in subdivision (d) of Section 25402, adopt standards, except for air and water quality,....”

Water Code Section 237 and Section 462 of the Waste Water Reuse Law, direct the Department of Water Resources to:

237. “...either independently or in cooperation with any person or any county, state, federal, or other agency, including, but not limited to, the State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Commission, shall conduct studies and investigations on the need and availability of water for thermal electric powerplant cooling purposes, and shall report thereon to the Legislature from time to time....”

462. “...conduct studies and investigations on the availability and quality of waste water and uses of reclaimed waste water for beneficial purposes including, but not limited to ... and cooling for thermal electric powerplants.”

Decisions on waste discharge requirements, water rights permits, water quality control plans, and other specific water quality control implementing actions by the State and Regional Boards shall be consistent with provisions of this policy.

The Board declares its intent to determine from time to time the need for revising this policy.

## Definitions

1. Inland Water – all waters within the territorial limits of California exclusive of the waters of the Pacific Ocean outside of enclosed bays, estuaries, and coastal lagoons.
2. Fresh Inland Waters – those inland waters which are suitable for use as a source of domestic, municipal, or agricultural water supply and which provide habitat for fish and wildlife.
3. Salt Sinks – areas designated by the Regional Water Quality Control Boards to receive saline waste discharges.
4. Brackish Waters – includes all waters with a salinity range of 1,000 to 30,000 mg/l and a chloride concentration range of 250 to 12,000 mg/l. The application of the term “brackish” to a water is not intended to imply that such water is no longer suitable for industrial or agricultural purposes.
5. Steam-Electric Power Generating Facilities – electric power generating facilities utilizing fossil or nuclear-type fuel or solar heating in conjunction with a thermal cycle employing the steam-water system as the thermodynamic medium and for the purposes of this policy is synonymous with the word “powerplant”.
6. Blowdown – the minimum discharge of either boiler water or recirculating cooling water for the purpose of limiting the buildup of concentrations of materials in excess of desirable limits established by best engineering practice.
7. Closed Cycle Systems – a cooling water system from which there is no discharge of wastewater other than blowdown.
8. Once-Through Cooling – a cooling water system in which there is no recirculation of the cooling water after its initial use.
9. Evaporative Cooling Facilities – evaporative towers, cooling ponds, or cooling canals, which utilize evaporation as a means of wasting rejected heat to the atmosphere.
10. Thermal Plan – “Water Quality Control Plan for Control of Temperature In the Coastal and Interstate Waters and Enclosed Bays and Estuaries of California”.
11. Ocean Plan – “Water Quality Control Plan for Ocean Waters of California”.

## Basis of Policy

1. The State Board believes it is essential that every reasonable effort be made to conserve energy supplies and reduce energy demands to minimize adverse effects on water supply and water quality and at the same time satisfy the State's energy requirements.
2. The increasing concern to limit changes to the coastal environment and the potential hazards of earthquake activity along the coast has led the electric utility industry to consider siting steam-electric generating plants inland as an alternative to proposed coastal locations.
3. Although many of the impacts of coastal powerplants on the marine environment are still not well understood, it appears the coastal marine environment is less susceptible than inland waters to the water quality impacts associated with powerplant cooling. Operation of existing coastal powerplants indicate that these facilities either meet the standards of the State's Thermal Plan and Ocean Plan or could do so readily with appropriate technological modifications. Furthermore, coastal locations provide for application of a wide range of cooling technologies which do not require the consumptive use of inland waters and therefore would not place an additional burden on the State's limited supply of inland waters. These technologies include once-through cooling which is appropriate for most coastal sites, potential use of saltwater cooling towers, or use of brackish water where more stringent controls are required for environmental considerations at specific sites.
4. There is a limited supply of inland water resources in California. Basin planning conducted by the State Board has shown that there is no available water for new allocations in some basins. Projected future water demands when compared to existing developed water supplies indicate that general fresh-water shortages will occur in many areas of the State prior to the year 2000. The use of inland waters for powerplant cooling needs to be carefully evaluated to assure proper future allocation of inland waters considering all other beneficial uses. The loss of inland waters considering all other beneficial uses. The loss of inland waters through evaporation in powerplant cooling facilities may be considered an unreasonable use of inland waters when general shortages occur.
5. The Regional Boards have adopted water quality objectives including temperature objectives including temperature objectives for all surface waters in the State.
6. Disposal of once-through cooling waters from powerplants to inland water is incompatible with maintaining the water quality objectives of the State Board's "Thermal Plan" and "Water Quality Control Plans."
7. The improper disposal of blowdown from evaporative cooling facilities may have an adverse impact on the quality of inland surface and ground waters and on fish and wildlife.

8. An important consideration in the increased use of inland water for powerplant cooling or for any other purpose in the Central Valley Region is the reduction in the available quantity of water to meet the Delta outflow requirements necessary to protect Delta water quality objectives and standards. Additionally, existing contractual agreements to provide future water supplies to the Central Valley, the South Coastal Basin, and other areas using supplemental water supplies are threatening to further reduce the Central Valley outflow necessary to protect the Delta environment.
9. The California Constitution and the California Water Code declare that the right to use water from a natural stream or watercourse is limited to such water as shall be reasonably required for beneficial use and does not extend to the waste or unreasonable use or unreasonable method of use or unreasonable method of diversion. Section 761, Article 17.2, Subchapter 2, Chapter 3, Title 23, California Administrative Code provides that permits or licenses for the appropriation of water will contain a term which will subject the permit or license to the continuing authority of the State Board to prevent waste, unreasonable use, unreasonable method of use, or unreasonable method of diversion of said water.
10. The Water Code authorizes the State Board to prohibit the discharge of wastes to surface and ground waters of the State.

### Principles

1. It is the Board's position that from a water quantity and quality standpoint the source of powerplant cooling water should come from the following sources in this order of priority depending on site specifics such as environmental, technical and economic feasibility consideration: (1) wastewater being discharged to the ocean, (2) ocean, (3) brackish water from natural sources or irrigation return flow, (4) inland wastewaters of low TDS, and (5) other inland waters.
2. Where the Board has jurisdiction, use of fresh inland waters for powerplant cooling will be approved by the Board only when it is demonstrated that the use of other water supply sources or other methods of cooling would be environmentally undesirable or economically unsound.
3. In considering issuance of a permit or license to appropriate water for powerplant cooling, the Board will consider the reasonableness of the proposed water use when compared with other present and future needs for the water source and when viewed in the context of alternative water sources that could be used for the purpose. The Board will give great weight to the results of studies made pursuant to the Warren-Alquist State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Act and carefully evaluate studies by the Department of Water Resources made pursuant to Sections 237 and 462, Division 1 of the California Water Code.

4. The discharge of blowdown water from cooling towers or return flows from once-through cooling shall not cause a violation of water quality objectives or waste discharge requirements established by the Regional Boards.
5. The use of unlined evaporation ponds to concentrate salts from blowdown waters will be permitted only at salt sinks approved by the Regional and State Boards. Proposals to utilize unlined evaporation ponds for final disposal of blowdown waters must include studies of alternative methods of disposal. These studies must show that the geologic strata underlying the proposed ponds or salt sink will protect usable groundwater.
6. Studies of availability of inland waters for use in powerplant cooling facilities to be constructed in Central Valley basins, the South Coastal Basins or other areas which receive supplemental water from Central Valley streams as for all major new uses must include an analysis of the impact of such use on Delta outflow and Delta water quality objectives. The studies associated with powerplants should include an analysis of the cost and water use associated with the use of alternative cooling facilities employing dry, or wet/dry modes of operation.
7. The State Board encourages water supply agencies and power generating utilities and agencies to study the feasibility of using wastewater for powerplant cooling. The State Board encourages the use of wastewater for powerplant cooling where it is appropriate. Furthermore, Section 25601(d) of the Warren-Alquist Energy Resources Conservation and Development Act directs the Commission to study, “expanded use of wastewater as cooling water and other advances in powerplant cooling” and Section 462 of the Waste Water Reuse Law directs the Department of Water Resources to “...conduct studies and investigations on the availability and quality of waste water and uses of reclaimed waste water for beneficial purposes including, but not limited to... and cooling for thermal electric powerplants.”

#### Discharge Prohibitions

1. The discharge to land disposal sites of blowdown waters from inland powerplant cooling facilities shall be prohibited except to salt sinks or to lined facilities approved by the Regional and State Boards for the reception of such wastes.
2. The discharge of wastewaters from once-through inland powerplant cooling facilities shall be prohibited unless the discharger can show that such a practice will maintain the existing water quality and aquatic environment of the State’s water resources.
3. The Regional Boards may grant exceptions to these discharge prohibitions on a case-by-case basis in accordance with exception procedures included in the “Water Quality Control Plan for Control of Temperature In the Coastal and Interstate Waters and Enclosed Bays and Estuaries of California.



## Implementation

1. Regional Water Quality Control Boards will adopt waste discharge requirements for discharges from powerplant cooling facilities which specify allowable mass emission rates and/or concentrations of effluent constituents for the blowdown waters. Waste discharge requirements for powerplant cooling facilities will also specify the water quality conditions to be maintained in the receiving waters.
2. The discharge requirements shall contain a monitoring program to be conducted by the discharger to determine compliance with waste discharge requirements.
3. When adopting waste discharge requirements for powerplant cooling facilities the Regional Boards shall consider other environmental factors and may require an environmental impact report, and shall condition the requirement in accordance with Section 2718, Subchapter 17, Chapter 3, Title 23, California Administrative Code.
4. The State Board shall include a term in all permits and licenses for appropriation of water for use in powerplant cooling that requires the permittee or licensee to conduct ongoing studies of the environmental desirability and economic feasibility of changing facility operations to minimize the use of fresh inland waters. Study results will be submitted to the State Board at intervals as specified in the permit term.
5. Petitions by the appropriator to change the nature of the use of appropriated water in an existing permit or license to allow the use of inland water for powerplant cooling may have an impact on the quality of the environment and as such require the preparation of an environmental impact statement or a supplement to an existing statement regarding, among other factors, an analysis of the reasonableness of the proposed use.
6. Applications to appropriate inland waters for powerplant cooling purpose shall include results of studies comparing the environmental impact of alternative inland sites as well as alternative water supplies and cooling facilities. Studies of alternative coastal sites must be included in the environmental impact report. Alternatives to be considered in the environmental impact report, including but not limited to sites, water supply, and cooling facilities, shall be mutually agreed upon by the prospective appropriator and the State Board staff. These studies should include comparisons of environmental impact and economic and social benefits and costs in conformance with the Warren-Alquist State Energy Resources Conservation and Development Act, the California Coastal Zone Plan, the California Environmental Quality Act and the National Environmental Policy Act.