



Fact Sheet

Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board Solutions to the Nitrate Problem

The Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board plan to address the nitrate problem is based on a three-pronged strategy consisting of 1) informing and protecting water users from known public health threats due to nitrate pollution, 2) implementing source control to reduce nitrate loading over time, and 3) supporting ongoing monitoring and assessment to document measurable improvements in source reduction and groundwater and drinking water quality.

Protecting Public Health

Local Agency Outreach - In the spring of 2010, the regional board began reaching out to the state and local (county) health agencies, public health officials and board of supervisors within our region via letters, meetings and teleconferences. These efforts have been focused on urging the local agencies to address the population most at-risk of nitrate pollution, those relying on domestic wells and local small and state small water system wells for drinking water.

Domestic Well Outreach and Sampling – The board is currently in the process of developing a domestic well outreach and sampling program in the Central Coast Region to help educate domestic well users about the nitrate pollution problem and provide them with free nitrate sampling. This program is modeled after the State Water Board's GAMA Program. The board is working to ensure that all stakeholders are involved in discussions related to the nitrate pollution, and have deliberately engaged environmental justice organizations and rural communities affected by the nitrate pollution.

Provision of Replacement Water – The board is currently in the process of evaluating and developing three individual enforcement cases which may require dischargers who have caused nitrate pollution of drinking water wells/systems to provide replacement water to the individuals connected to the polluted water wells/systems.

Source Control

Agricultural Regulatory Program - The Agricultural Regulatory Program regulates discharges from irrigated agricultural lands to protect surface water and groundwater. This program is the cornerstone of our nitrate source control implementation efforts. The Ag Order focuses on priority water quality issues, such as toxicity, nutrients, and sediments with nitrate impacts to groundwater that serve as a drinking water source as the highest priority.

The Regional Board is currently prioritizing implementation efforts in the major agricultural areas of the region with the most severe and widespread nitrate impacts - the Salinas River,



Santa Maria, and Pajaro River watersheds. Renewal of the Ag Order has been an ongoing and extensive internal and public process since mid-2008, with an increased emphasis on addressing nitrate loading to groundwater from irrigated agriculture.

The Ag Order adopted by the Central Coast Water Board in March 2012 includes requirements focused on monitoring to identify priority areas, source reduction via improved nutrient and irrigation efficiency, and monitoring and reporting to document the short- and long-term effectiveness of source reduction measures. The data collected are being uploaded to and managed through the Water Boards' GeoTracker information system.

Wastewater Permitting – The board began including salt and nutrient management planning requirements and associated effluent or receiving water limits and monitoring requirements within our wastewater (WDR/NPDES) permits in 2004/2005 as permits came up for renewal or when we received new permit applications. The board is also participating in the development of regional salt and nutrient management plans per the State Water Board's Recycled Water Policy.

Grants Program – In 2007/2008 the board aligned its grants program with the various programs, expertise and regional priorities in an effort to address and leverage our highest water quality priorities through grant funded projects. This was particularly important for the implementation of nutrient and irrigation efficiency projects.

Since 2006, the board has funded millions of dollars for grant projects to test new practices and techniques that would mitigate or treat discharges from irrigated lands or to implement practices to improve irrigation and nutrient management practices. Results of the various studies demonstrate that significant reductions in nitrate loading are possible and the results are being used to educate growers in the region about effective management practices that can improve surface water and groundwater quality.

Most recently, the Water Board awarded \$3 Million in Proposition 84 funds to implement a Central Coast Irrigation and Nutrient Management Program to reduce nitrate loading in the most severely impaired agricultural areas of the region.

Regional Monitoring and Assessment

As part of the Ag Order the board compiled an extensive amount of available data and conducted a regional assessment of nitrate loading and groundwater and drinking water impacts associated with irrigated agriculture. The information is being used to support both the implementation and renewal of the Ag Order. One of the outcomes of this process was the need to develop more effective and efficient regional monitoring and assessment tools.

The board is also currently developing a groundwater assessment and protection program. This program is intended to leverage and build on existing regional groundwater monitoring efforts being implemented by local agencies/entities and to coordinate with other pending programs such the salt and nutrient management plans and California Statewide Groundwater



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Elevation Monitoring (CASGEM) program. Data from this program will also be uploaded to and managed within GeoTracker. *(This fact sheet was last updated April 18, 2012)*