



CALIFORNIA WATER BOARDS

State Water Resources Control Board

Regional Water Quality Control Boards

Water Board Function: Irrigated agricultural lands discharge regulation

Water Board Program(s) Relevant to Function:
Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program (Agricultural Waivers)

Problem/Issue Description:

Discharges from agricultural lands include irrigation return flow, flows from tile drains, and stormwater runoff. These discharges can affect water quality by transporting pollutants, including pesticides, sediment, nutrients, salts (including selenium and boron), pathogens, and heavy metals, from cultivated fields into surface waters. Many surface water bodies are impaired because of pollutants from agricultural sources. Groundwater bodies have also suffered pesticide, nitrate, and salt contamination. Statewide, approximately 9,493 miles of rivers/streams and some 513,130 acres of lakes/reservoirs are listed on the 303(d) list as being impaired by irrigated agriculture. Of these, approximately 2,800 miles, or approximately 28%, have been identified as impaired by pesticides.

Overview of Function:

To monitor, assess, and control the impact of agricultural discharges to waters of the State. Monitoring data will be used to develop farm water quality management plans (MPs) and best management practices (BMPs). These MPs and BMPs will reduce agricultural related pollution in order to protect both surface and ground water. Staff will track water quality improvements as the result of BMP implementation to provide an inventory of proven BMPs to be used by the agricultural community. Another function of the program is to develop partnerships among various stakeholders through education and outreach.

Role of Water Board Staff:

The Central Coast, Los Angeles, Central Valley, and San Diego Water Boards have adopted conditional waivers for discharges from irrigated agricultural lands. The Colorado River Basin Water Board utilizes a conditional prohibition. To assess and control agricultural discharges, these Regional Boards are using different regulatory models, monitoring and reporting programs, enforcement, and practical solutions.

Role of Regional Board Members:

Conducts public hearing, and considers and adopts WDR.

Role of State Board Members:

Reviews petitions from Regional Board adoption of WDR. Issues statewide general orders. Adopts policies and regulations.

Primary Issues of Concern:

- Program Resources
- Grower Enrollment/Cooperation, Agriculture Agencies Collaboration (i.e., Department of Pesticide Regulation [DPR], Department of Food and Agriculture [CDFA] DPH, Department of Fish and Game [DF&G], Farm Bureau, Ag Commissioners, resource conservation districts [RCDs], UC Cooperative Extension Farm Advisors, etc.)
- Grant money for MP and BMP development and implementation, program information database and QA/QC

Definition of Key Terms:

Conditional Waivers – Regulatory tool used by the Water Boards to control wastewater discharges.

Management Plans – A plan guiding overall management of an area. A management plan usually includes objectives, goals, standards, and guidelines, management actions, and monitoring plans.

Management Practices – Methods that have been determined to be the most effective, practical means of preventing or reducing pollution from non-point sources