



EXECUTIVE OFFICERS REPORT North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

April 2012

Development of a Water Quality Compliance Program for Discharges from Irrigated Lands

Ben Zabinsky

North Coast Regional Water Board staff are in the process of developing a *Water Quality Compliance Program for Discharges from Irrigated Agricultural Lands in the North Coast Region (Program)*. Activities associated with agriculture have the potential to contribute to water quality problems through the over-application of fertilizers and pesticides, human-caused erosion, pollutants in tailwater return flows, and the removal and suppression of riparian vegetation. The purpose of the Program is to address these water quality issues and meet the requirements of the *California Water Code, the State Nonpoint Source Policy, and the Klamath River Total Maximum Daily Loads*. The scope of the Program will include crop types such as vineyards, orchards, row crops, forage crops, field crops, irrigated pasture, and medicinal marijuana farms.

Staff intend to develop a program that is both feasible for growers to implement and protective of water quality. As part of program development, Regional Water Board staff have formed a Stakeholder Advisory Group made up of representatives of agriculture and water quality interests in the North Coast Region.

The Advisory Group has been meeting and will continue to meet in two formats; as a full group with all members and also as four separate subgroups that will focus on regional issues. The geographic areas of the sub-regional groups are:

- Sonoma, Mendocino, and Marin counties
- Del Norte, Humboldt, and Trinity counties
- Scott River and Shasta River watersheds, and the Upper Mid-Klamath area
- Tule Lake area and Butte Valley



Del Norte, Humboldt, and Trinity Sub-Regional Advisory Group Meeting.

Photo Credit: Rebecca Fitzgerald

The sub-regional groups will provide recommendations to the full Advisory Group, which will then make recommendations to Regional Water Board staff.

Based on those recommendations, staff will develop the Program elements and alternatives that will go on to public review and consideration by the Regional Water Board. The recommendations will help ensure that the Program accounts for the diversity of locations, types of agriculture and risks to water quality present in the North Coast Region, while maintaining a level of consistency regionwide.



Siskiyou County Sub-Regional Advisory Group Meeting.

Photo Credit: Rebecca Fitzgerald

The sub-regional groups met in February. Meetings were held in Santa Rosa, Eureka, Yreka, and Tulelake. At the meetings, Regional Water Board staff gave a brief background on the necessity for the Program and proposed a set of goals for water quality management on farms and ranches. In addition to providing comments, Advisory Group members requested information on other agricultural regulatory programs around the state and the recent revisions to the State's fee schedule for irrigated lands. In response to these information requests, Regional Water Board staff will hold an informational webinar/teleconference meeting on April 18, 2012, that will feature presentations by staff of the State Water Resources Control Board. The next

round of sub-regional group meetings is scheduled for May 2012. Meeting summaries, powerpoint presentations, and agendas can be found on the Program web page. Also on the web page, stakeholders can subscribe to the mailing list and stay informed on the latest program developments:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/northcoast/water_issues/programs/irrigated_lands/

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Composting Issues at the State and Regional Water Board

Richard Azevedo

"Composting" is a biologically-driven process that can use a variety of feed stocks and produce a number of different useable products such as landscape mulch, soil amendments, or soil fertilizers. Current State law mandates waste diversion by cities and counties. There are about 300 facilities statewide and we expect that the number and size of facilities providing these services will increase as more emphasis is placed on waste diversion. As California attempts to increase the amount of material diverted away from landfills, compost operations are changing from the traditional green waste, manures, and agricultural amendments to composting sludge, food waste, and potentially waste streams from industrial processes.

Existing compost facilities are varied in their operation with respect to size and the type of feedstock accepted. Consequently, the threat to the environment will vary. Within the North Coast Region facilities range from: green waste composting; 5-acre facilities that receive manures and amendments; and large scale county diversion programs such as *Sonoma Compost* located atop the Mecham Road landfill in Sonoma County.



Stockpiles of processing compost.
Photo Credit: Rick Azevedo

To address the issues facing the compost industry, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) has been coordinating with CalRecycle and industry representatives over the past several years to develop a streamlined and consistent permitting process for compost businesses. The State Water Board is considering a statewide general order for compost operations. Public workshops have been held in Northern and Southern California to discuss the concept and content of any general order.

The State Water Board proposed order is in the form of a waiver. The waiver is broad in its scope and intended to address most compost operations using agricultural type feed stocks as well as biosolids. Composting of many "industrial" wastes is outside the scope of the waiver. The proposed order includes only those facilities that can contain and recycle all their wastewater within the operations. Facilities that land apply or discharge process water to surface water will not be included in the proposed order. Consequently, the usefulness of the proposed order within the North Coast Region, with its high rainfall amounts that produce more volume than most facilities can use in their operation, will be somewhat limited. The order proposes that active composting areas and any ponds will be lined.

Construction standards will vary depending on the facility's location and the type of feed stocks accepted. The proposed order includes a listing of acceptable feed stocks, prohibits feed stocks and exemptions for small facilities and agricultural operations. Any facility not meeting the conditions of the order will need to obtain an individual permit.



Finished compost ready for bulk sale.
Photo Credit: Rick Azevedo

The proposed order seeks to provide a streamlined, consistent permitting and review process for compost operations statewide. Individual Regional Water Boards will provide oversight of facilities within their respective regions. The draft Order is scheduled for release in July 2012 with public workshops in August 2012, and a tentative adoption date in October 2012.

For more information on the current process, the State Water Board webpage has more details:

http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/compost/index.shtml#news

North Coast Regional Water Board staff continues to inspect composting facilities within our region, and work with composters to improve best management practices (BMPs) to protect water quality, especially in nutrient impaired watersheds.

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