



Fact Sheet

Report Recommendations to Address Impact of Nitrates Contamination in Groundwater Require Renewed Efforts

Overview

Groundwater contamination by nitrate is a major water quality issue and can pose health risks at concentrations above health standards. A State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) report on nitrates, which are principally a by-product of fertilizers, makes 15 recommendations to ensure clean drinking water is accessible to communities with groundwater contamination, calls for monitoring contamination for future remediation and identifying a funding source to pay for improvements and access to drinking water in at-risk communities.

Nitrate contamination is particularly significant in the Tulare Lake Basin and Salinas Valley areas. The report titled "*Recommendations Addressing Nitrate in Groundwater in the Tulare Lake Basin and Salinas Valley*" was released and sent to the Legislature for consideration per the mandate of Chapter 1 of the Second Extraordinary Session of 2008 (SBX2 1, Perata). The Legislation required the State Water Board to develop pilot projects focusing on nitrate in groundwater in the Tulare Lake Basin and Salinas Valley and to submit a report to the Legislature on the scope and findings of the pilot projects, including recommendations.

Nitrate a Public Health Concern

Nitrate pollution in groundwater is a widespread water quality problem that can pose serious health risks to pregnant women and infants if consumed in significant concentrations. Nitrate contaminated groundwater is a particularly significant problem in the Tulare Lake Basin and Salinas Valley areas, where approximately 2.6 million people rely on groundwater for their drinking water. Other areas of the State, however, also have nitrate contaminated groundwater that is used as a source of drinking water.

Significant Academic and Multi Agency Participation

In developing this report, the State Water Board relied significantly on information and findings from: 1) the State Water Board's contracted study with the University of California, Davis resulting in a 2012 report entitled *Addressing Nitrate in California's Drinking Water* http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/nitrate_project/index.shtml 2) the Governor's Drinking Water Stakeholder Group, which was comprised of representatives from state agencies, environmental justice advocates, and agricultural representatives; and 3) an Interagency Task Force, which included representatives from the California Department of Public Health, the Department of Food and Agriculture, the Department of Pesticide Regulation, the California Environmental Protection Agency and local environmental health agencies.



15 Specific Recommendations

The State Water Board makes 15 specific recommendations to address water quality issues associated with nitrate contaminated groundwater. These recommendations reflect a comprehensive strategy focused on the following four key areas:

- **Providing Safe Drinking Water.** Creating a reliable, stable funding source, integrated with institutional changes, to provide long-term safe drinking water infrastructure and interim solutions for the small disadvantaged communities impacted by nitrate contamination.
- **Monitoring, Assessment and Notification.** Developing and managing the data necessary to identify and effectively manage nitrate contaminated groundwater, with particular attention focused on (1) defining nitrate high-risk areas in order to prioritize regulatory oversight and assistance efforts in these areas, (2) notifying groundwater users in nitrate high-risk areas and (3) requiring property owners to sample their well as part of a property title transfer or purchase.
- **Nitrogen Application Reporting.** Developing and implementing a statewide nitrogen fertilizer application reporting system to effectively monitor nitrate application.
- **Protecting Groundwater.** Developing an effective statewide regulatory system for minimizing discharges of nitrates to groundwater, including (1) establishing a nutrient management certification program which recognizes the importance of water quality protection, (2) convening a task force of experts to identify and evaluate components of existing agricultural nitrate control programs for managing nitrate in groundwater, and (3) evaluating the effectiveness of existing permits for food processing and wastewater treatment facilities to address nitrate contamination in high-risk areas.

Ensuring Safe Drinking Water Requires New Funding Source

A majority of the report recommendations rely on identifying a funding source for successful implementation. The regulatory, monitoring, education and research recommendations can draw from existing programs with dedicated funding. The provision of safe drinking water for disadvantaged communities will require a new funding source. Existing funding available are the Safe Drinking Water State Revolving Fund (SRF), which is capitalized with federal grants, and state bond funds. Disadvantaged community demand outweighs limited existing funding through the SRF. There is a need to identify a new funding source, which can be used in combination with existing funding sources, to design, build, operate and maintain safe drinking water systems for disadvantaged communities. This report gives recommendations to the Legislature on the issue of funding.

Additional Resources

To see the report, please visit:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/water_issues/programs/nitrate_project/index.shtml

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