

**STATE OF CALIFORNIA
CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL COAST REGION
895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401**

TIME SCHEDULE ORDER R3-2026-0009

February 5, 2026

**REQUIRING THE
CITY OF SANTA MARIA
TO COMPLY WITH REQUIREMENTS PRESCRIBED
IN GENERAL WASTE DISCHARGE REQUIREMENTS ORDER R3-2020-0020 FOR
DISCHARGES FROM DOMESTIC WASTEWATER SYSTEMS WITH FLOWS
GREATER THAN 100,000 GALLONS PER DAY**

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Coast Region (Central Coast Water Board) finds that:

BACKGROUND

1. The City of Santa Maria (Santa Maria) owns and operates a domestic wastewater treatment plant (WWTP) located at 601 Black Road, Santa Maria, in Santa Barbara County.
2. The WWTP has a permitted maximum daily flow of 8.0 million gallons per day (mgd) and had an average influent flow of approximately 6.48 mgd in 2024 and 6.14 mgd in 2025. The daily maximum flow of 8.0 mgd was exceeded many times during the same time frame. Treatment and disposal consist of mechanical screening followed by two primary clarifiers, two primary and two secondary aerobic trickling filters, two secondary clarifiers, and percolation ponds covering an area of 80.4 acres. Santa Maria's WWTP employs treatment equivalent to secondary treatment (40 CFR §133.105).
3. On June 16, 2023, the Central Coast Water Board enrolled Santa Maria into *General Waste Discharge Requirements Order R3-2020-0020 for Discharges from Domestic Wastewater Systems with Flows Greater than 100,000 Gallons per Day* (General Permit).¹ The General Permit regulates the discharge of secondary treated effluent from the WWTP to land, and the June 16, 2023 notice of applicability (Notice of Applicability) includes facility-specific information and requirements. The Notice of Applicability includes interim effluent limitations for five-day biochemical oxygen demand (BOD₅), total suspended solids (TSS), settleable solids, total dissolved

¹ A direct link to the General Permit is available here:
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/board_decisions/adopted_orders/2020/r32020_0020.pdf
The General Permit enrollment letter and all recent reports and correspondence are available on GeoTracker under the "Site Maps/Documents" tab linked here:
https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/profile_report.asp?global_id=WDR100029526

solids, sodium, chloride, and pH for the first 24 months of enrollment pursuant to Part V.A (Effluent Limitations) of the General Permit. The General Permit and the Notice of Applicability require Santa Maria to comply with the most recently issued monitoring and reporting program.

4. The General Permit includes facility-specific effluent limitations based on treatment technology and the water quality objectives for the underlying groundwater established in the Water Quality Control Plan for the Central Coast Basin (Basin Plan). The WWTP overlies the Santa Maria River Valley - Upper Guadalupe sub-area groundwater basin.
5. The General Permit establishes BOD₅, TSS, and total nitrogen effluent limitations as shown in Table 1. Pursuant to the Notice of Applicability (Notice of Applicability Attachment 1 – Table 6 and 7 ²), these effluent limitations went into effect on June 16, 2025, two years from the date the Notice of Applicability was issued to Santa Maria. Therefore, as of June 16, 2025, Santa Maria must comply with these effluent limits at the monitoring locations specified in Monitoring and Reporting Program R3-2023-0032.

Table 1. Effluent Limitations

Constituent	Units	Limit	Limit
BOD ₅	mg/L	30 (30-Day Average)	45 (7-Day Average)
TSS	mg/L	30 (30-Day Average)	45 (7-Day Average)
Total Nitrogen	mg/L	10 (25-Month Rolling Median)	Not applicable

mg/L = milligrams per liter

6. Pursuant to Notice of Applicability Attachment 1 – Section 3.C ², the General Permit allows the discharger to choose the point of compliance for total nitrogen in either groundwater (with a limitation of 1.5 mg/L) or effluent (with a limitation of 10 mg/L). In the June 2024 Time Schedule Compliance Plan, Santa Maria requested the point of compliance be the treated effluent. Through effluent monitoring, Santa Maria must demonstrate compliance with the total nitrogen limitation of 10 mg/L (as a 25-month rolling median) that went into effect on June 16, 2025 as identified in Table 7 of the Notice of Applicability.

NEED FOR TIME SCHEDULE ORDER

7. As demonstrated by data Santa Maria reported in its June 2024 Time Schedule Compliance Plan and presented in Table 2, WWTP effluent concentrations of BOD₅, TSS, and total nitrogen exceed the General Permit effluent limitations. Santa Maria's WWTP fails to treat wastewater so that it does not pose a threat to groundwater; therefore, a discharge of waste is taking place that violates or threatens to violate requirements prescribed by the Central Coast Water Board.

² Santa Maria Notice of Applicability R3-2020-0020

https://documents.geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/regulators/deliverable_documents/1381467521/Santa%20Maria%20R3-2020-0020%20NOA_MRP_final.pdf

Table 2. Minimum and Maximum Range and Average BOD₅, TSS, and Total Nitrogen Effluent Concentrations Reported from 2023 to 2025

Constituent	2023	2024	2025 ⁽²⁾	Limitation ⁽⁴⁾
	Range / Average mg/L	Range / Average mg/L	Range / Average mg/L	
BOD ₅	56-80 / 70	53-111 / 78	58- >157 / 90	30 ⁽¹⁾
TSS	14-96 / 40	18-55 / 35	27-47 / 38	30 ⁽¹⁾
Total Nitrogen	32-50 / 39	39-50 / 47	35-51 / 45	10 ⁽³⁾

Table Notes:

(1) 30-day average.

(2) Values obtained from self-reported first and second quarter 2025 monitoring reports.

(3) 25-month rolling median.

(4) Effluent limitations went into effect on June 16, 2025.

8. Santa Maria's WWTP trickling filter system was originally built in the 1930s followed by several expansions through to 2010 to accommodate population growth. It was never designed to remove nitrogen from wastewater. The General Permit prohibits a wastewater discharge from causing underlying groundwater to exceed Basin Plan water quality objectives. Existing groundwater quality data from surrounding groundwater monitoring wells is presented in Table 3. Data indicates that total nitrogen concentrations are elevated downgradient of wastewater percolation ponds and exceed the Santa Maria River Valley - Upper Guadalupe sub-area groundwater water quality objective, demonstrating that the discharge of waste is violating requirements prescribed by the Central Coast Water Board. Santa Maria must improve treatment to comply with the nitrogen limitations in either effluent or groundwater. Pursuant to the General Permit, Santa Maria can propose the compliance point in effluent, instead of groundwater, if it can achieve the 10 mg/L of total nitrogen limitation in effluent as required by the General Permit Table 6.

Table 3. Minimum and Maximum Range, and 25-Month Rolling Median Groundwater Quality Reported from 2020 to 2024

Constituent	Units	Upgradient	Downgradient		Water Quality Objective ⁽²⁾
		UMW-1	DMW-1	DMW-2	
Total Nitrogen	Range / 25-Month Rolling Median ⁽¹⁾ mg/L	2-17 / 5	5-22 / 15	9-33 / 28	1.4

Table Notes:

(1) The 25-month rolling median is derived from groundwater concentrations detected between October 2022 and October 2024.

(2) Santa Maria River Valley - Upper Guadalupe sub-area groundwater water quality objective.

9. To comply with its effluent limitations for BOD₅, TSS, and total nitrogen, Santa Maria has proposed to upgrade the WWTP to comply with the General Permit. Santa Maria investigated options for optimizing the existing trickling filters to improve WWTP performance. Santa Maria has implemented measures such as adjusting trickling filter rotational arm speeds, as well as replacing and rehabilitation of trickling filter arms. However, to meet effluent limits, Santa Maria has determined an

upgraded WWTP is required. This time schedule order requires Santa Maria to implement actions to achieve compliance with the General Permit BOD₅, TSS, and total nitrogen limitations.

10. On October 17, 2023, Santa Maria followed the Proposition 218 process, and the city council approved a series of four annual fee increases to occur between 2024-2027 as a first step to start building funds to cover the cost for planning and constructing a major modernization of the wastewater treatment plant.
11. Santa Maria submitted a *Time Schedule Compliance Plan* to the Central Coast Water Board on June 12, 2024 and a *Time Schedule Compliance Plan Milestone 1 and 5 Updates* on January 6, 2025.³ The time schedule compliance plan presents water quality data, a detailed description and chronology of the efforts to improve treatment and disposal, justification for the need for additional time to comply with effluent and groundwater limitations, and a time schedule and justification of specific actions Santa Maria will take to achieve compliance as soon as feasible.
12. Some census tracts within Santa Maria are classified as a small, disadvantaged community or severely disadvantaged community. This finding is based on population, the census tract's annual median household income as defined by California Water Code section 79505.5, and as reported by the Census American Community Survey 2016-2020 dataset.
13. Santa Maria currently does not have the funds to construct a proposed new wastewater treatment system and has requested additional time to comply with the General Permit that allows them time to apply for and secure funding.
14. This time schedule order establishes a final compliance date of September 30, 2034, which will provide Santa Maria with the time needed to plan, design, complete the required California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) elements, finance, build, and implement actions to reduce BOD₅, TSS, and total nitrogen wastewater effluent concentrations.
15. This time schedule order includes performance-based BOD₅, TSS, and total nitrogen interim effluent limits that are effective upon issuance of the time schedule order. The interim effluent limits were established through the Central Coast Water Board's evaluation of TSS, BOD₅, and total nitrogen effluent concentrations over the last several years. Using this information, performance-based interim effluent limits are established that represent typical existing effluent quality, ensuring effluent water quality is not further degraded over time, and gives Santa Maria time to implement actions to achieve compliance with the General Permit.
16. This time schedule order establishes interim effluent limitations because compliance with the final effluent limitations in the General Permit cannot be achieved by the wastewater treatment plant at this time.

³ The documents and all reports are available on the GeoTracker website under the "Site Maps / Documents" tab: https://geotracker.waterboards.ca.gov/profile_report.asp?global_id=WDR100029526

REGULATORY BASIS

17. California Water Code section 13300 states:

Whenever a regional board finds that a discharge of waste is taking place or threatening to take place that violates or will violate requirements prescribed by the regional board, or the state board, or that the waste collection, treatment, or disposal facilities of a discharger are approaching capacity, the board may require the discharger to submit for approval of the board, with such modifications as it may deem necessary, a detailed time schedule of specific actions the discharger shall take in order to correct or prevent a violation of requirements.

18. Chapter 3, Section 3.3 of the Basin Plan states:

Controllable water quality shall conform to the water quality objectives contained herein. When other conditions cause degradation of water quality beyond the levels or limits established as water quality objectives, controllable conditions shall not cause further degradation of water quality.

Controllable water quality conditions are those actions or circumstances resulting from man's activities that may influence the quality of the waters of the State and that may be reasonably controlled.

Water quality objectives are considered to be necessary to protect those present and probable future beneficial uses enumerated in Chapter Two of this plan and to protect existing high-quality waters of the State. These objectives will be achieved primarily through the establishment of waste discharge requirements and through implementation of this water quality control plan.

In setting waste discharge requirements, the Regional Board will consider the potential impact on beneficial uses within the area of influence of the discharge, the existing quality of receiving waters, and the appropriate water quality objectives. The Regional Board will make a finding of beneficial uses to be protected and establish waste discharge requirements to protect those uses and to meet water quality objectives.

19. Pursuant to California Water Code section 13167.5, the Central Coast Water Board must provide notice and a period of at least 30 days for public comment prior to the adoption of a time schedule order adopted pursuant to section 13300 that sets forth a schedule of compliance and required actions relating to waste discharge requirements prescribed pursuant to section 13263. The Central Coast Water Board provided notice and a 30-day public comment period from December 30, 2025 to January 30, 2026.
20. The Central Coast Water Board has notified Santa Maria and interested agencies and persons of its intent to issue the time schedule order concerning violations or threatened violations of waste discharge requirements.

21. This enforcement action is taken for the protection of the environment and as such is exempt from the provisions of CEQA Public Resources Code Section 21000, et seq. in accordance with section 15321, chapter 3, title 14, of the California Code of Regulations. However, it should be noted that, for the purposes of the upgrades to the WWTP, Santa Maria will comply with CEQA (Table 5 Task Summary - Task 3).

ORDERING

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED, pursuant to California Water Code sections 13300 and 13267 and to ensure compliance with the requirements of Waste Discharge Requirements Order R3-2020-0020:

1. Santa Maria must comply with the interim BOD₅, TSS, and total nitrogen effluent limits in Table 4, effective upon issuance of this time schedule order. The interim BOD₅, TSS, and total nitrogen limits are effective until all the tasks below are complete or by September 30, 2034, whichever comes first.

Table 4. Interim Effluent Limitations

Constituent	Units	30-Day Average	Sample Maximum
Biochemical Oxygen Demand, 5-Day (BOD ₅)	mg/L	119	157
Total Suspended Solids (TSS)	mg/L	43	62
Total Nitrogen	mg/L	55	55

2. Santa Maria must complete the following tasks on or before the specified dates:

Table 5. Task Summary

Task No.	Task	Due Date
1	<u>Master Planning for Long-Term Improvements</u> <i>Develop and adopt Master Plan to identify needed WWTP improvements to comply with Notice of Applicability final effluent limits.</i>	December 31, 2026
2	<u>Program Strategy and Execution Plan</u> <i>Develop strategy and execution plan for implementing the recommended project from the adopted Master Plan. The plan will include delivery method and revised implementation timeline.</i>	December 31, 2026
3	<u>WWTP Improvement Project Design and CEQA</u> <i>Design and complete the CEQA process for recommended improvements following completion of Tasks 1 and 2.</i>	January 1, 2027 through January 1, 2030

Task No.	Task	Due Date
3a	<u>Secure WWTP Improvement Project Funding</u>	December 31, 2028 through December 2032
4	<u>Bid and Construct WWTP Improvement Project</u> <i>Bid and construct WWTP improvement project. Commission and operate upgraded WWTP to meet new effluent limits.</i>	February 2030 through September 30, 2034

3. In addition to the reports required by the current monitoring and reporting program, semiannual status reports must be submitted on August 1 and February 1 of each year, documenting status and progress from January through June for semiannual report due August 1 and July through December for semiannual report due February 1. Santa Maria must submit semiannual status reports beginning August 1, 2026, and every six months thereafter until this time schedule order is confirmed to be complete by the Central Coast Water Board Executive Officer. At a minimum, the reports must include:
 - i. A summary of progress or delays during the previous six months (significant activities);
 - ii. Significant findings and associated actions;
 - iii. Activities scheduled for the next six months; and
 - iv. Summary of the BOD₅, TSS, and total nitrogen influent and effluent data from samples obtained within the previous six months. Also include a graph of concentration over time, discussion of trends, and comparison of data to interim effluent limitations. Santa Maria must continue to collect data at the frequency and location included in the existing monitoring and reporting program but provide a more detailed evaluation of the data in these semiannual status reports. Monitoring data will be used to determine compliance with interim effluent limitations set forth herein.
4. All technical reports and workplans that interpret percolation capacity, source water characteristics, treatment system studies, and groundwater data must be prepared and stamped by a California licensed civil engineer or professional geologist.
5. All reports required by this time schedule order must be provided electronically in searchable PDF and signed by either a principal executive officer or ranking elected official, or by a duly authorized representative of that person⁴. All reports must be submitted with a signed and certified cover letter and uploaded to GeoTracker Global ID WDR100029526.

⁴ To designate an authorized representative, complete this form linked here and submit to the Central Coast Water Board.
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/wastewater_permitting/docs/authorized-representative-form.pdf

6. Any person signing a report required by this time schedule order must make the following certification:

“I certify under penalty of perjury that this document and all attachments were prepared by me, or under my direction or supervision, following a system designed to ensure that qualified personnel properly gather and evaluate the information submitted. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this document and all attachments are true, accurate, and complete. I am aware that there are significant penalties for submitting false information, including the possibility of fine and imprisonment.”

7. If Santa Maria is unable to perform any activity or submit any documentation in compliance with the deadlines set forth in Table 5 Task Summary, Santa Maria may request, in writing, an extension of the time for Executive Officer review and approval. The extension request must include justification for the delay and must be submitted at least thirty days prior to the respective deadline to be considered complete and timely. The Executive Officer may approve an extension in writing to Santa Maria.
8. During the effective period of this time schedule order, Santa Maria must comply with all provisions of the General Permit and Notice of Applicability that are not in conflict with this time schedule order.

LEGAL AUTHORITY

If, in the opinion of the Executive Officer, Santa Maria fails to comply with any provisions of this time schedule order or fails to consistently demonstrate substantive progress towards achieving full compliance with limitations in the General Permit, the Executive Officer may terminate this time schedule order. Santa Maria may also be subject to issuance of a cease and desist order in accordance with California Water Code section 13301. The Central Coast Water Board reserves its right to take any enforcement action authorized by law.

The Central Coast Water Board's requirement that Santa Maria submit semi-annual reports is made pursuant to section 13267 of the California Water Code.

The cost of preparing each semi-annual report is estimated to be less than \$1,200 (hourly rate of \$150 and 8 hours of work). The reports, which will summarize water quality data and the status of tasks upgrading the WWTP and improving effluent water quality will provide Central Coast Water Board with information to evaluate time schedule order and General Permit compliance. This information and compliance with the time schedule order and the General Permit will, in turn, ensure protection of groundwater quality and human health. Thus, the burden, including costs, of the semi-annual reports bears a reasonable relationship to its need and the benefits to be obtained. More detailed information is available in the Central Coast Water Board's public file on this matter.

Santa Maria is required to submit this information as the owner and operator of the wastewater treatment plant. The evidence supporting this requirement is described herein and on GeoTracker.

Pursuant to section 13268 of the California Water Code, a violation of a California Water Code section 13267 requirement may subject Santa Maria to civil liability of up to \$1,000 per day for each day in which the violation occurs.

Pursuant to California Water Code section 13320, any aggrieved person may seek review of this time schedule order by filing a petition with the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board) for review in accordance with California Water Code section 13320, and California Code of Regulations, title 23, section 2050 et seq. The State Water Board must receive the petition by 5 pm on 30th day after the date of this time schedule order, except that if the 30th day following the date of this time schedule order falls on a Saturday, Sunday or state holiday, the petition must be received by the State Water Board by 5 pm on the next business day. Copies of the law and regulations applicable to filing petitions are available online at the address below or will be provided upon request.

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/public_notices/petitions/water_quality

This time schedule order will take effect on the date it is signed by the Executive Officer. The Executive Officer may modify the time schedule in this order to permit a specified task or tasks to be completed at later dates if Santa Maria demonstrates and the Executive Officer determines that the delay was beyond the reasonable control of Santa Maria.

Ordered By:

Ryan E. Lodge
Executive Officer

WDR Program

ECM Subject Name = City of Santa Maria Time Schedule Order No. R3-2026-0009

ECM/CIWQS Place ID = 255678

GeoTracker No. = WDR100029526

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