



Enforcement News

City of Colfax agrees to settlement for Bunch Creek sewage spill

Majority of penalty will be redirected to upgrade sewer collection system and prevent future spills

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SACRAMENTO – The city of Colfax has agreed to a \$49,845 fine to settle a case from July 2019 when a cracked PVC pipe sent about 119,000 gallons of sewage over six days into a creek that flows to the North Fork of the American River.

Discharges of raw sewage contain pathogens, nitrogen, ammonia, and organic matter. When spilled into a creek, elevated levels can cause a risk to human health and have negative impacts on aquatic.

Under the terms of the settlement, \$35,726 of the fine will go toward reducing the likelihood of future spills by offsetting some of the costs of a project to improve maintenance and monitoring of the collection system, as well as extend the operational life of the force main involved in the spill. The city will pay the remaining \$14,119 to the State Water Pollution Cleanup and Abatement Account.

“This was an unanticipated failure in the collection system that resulted this large sewage discharge,” said John J. Baum, assistant executive officer for the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board. “Our primary interest is to prevent future sewage spills, which is why we are allowing the City of Colfax, a small community with financial hardships, to use most of the penalty to upgrade their collection system.”

The spill was caused by a failure in a buried PVC pipe downstream of a sewage lift station. Spilled sewage seeped through the soil and into a roadside drainage, which flows to Bunch Creek and, ultimately, to the North Fork of the American River

Municipalities that operate sewage collection systems must enroll in the state’s General Waste Discharge Requirements for Sanitary Sewer Systems, which among other things, requires the



municipality to properly operate and maintain the system, and prohibits the discharge of sewage.

[The Central Valley Water Board](#) is a state agency responsible for protecting water quality and ensuring beneficial uses such as aquatic habitat and human health for 11,350 miles of streams, 579,110 acres of lakes, and the largest contiguous groundwater basin in California. It is the largest of nine regional boards, encompassing 60,000 square miles, or about 40 percent of the state. Thirty-eight of 58 counties are either completely or partially within the board's boundaries, formed by the crests of the Sierra Nevada on the east, the Coast Ranges and Klamath Mountains on the west, the Oregon border on the north, and the Tehachapi Mountains on the south.

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