



Enforcement News

Desert Water Agency agrees to pay \$181,947 penalty for sewage collection system spill

Colorado River Basin Regional Board approves settlement

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PALM DESERT – Desert Water Agency, a public utility that owns and operates a wastewater collection system serving Cathedral City, agreed to pay a \$181,947 penalty for discharging approximately 268,916 gallons of raw sewage into the Whitewater River Channel.

The incident occurred between Feb. 15-19 after a main pipe ruptured during a heavy storm, sending the untreated wastewater into the channel in Cathedral City. The agency successfully diverted the sewage when it became aware of the spill and later replaced the sewer line.

In the settlement approved today by the Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board, half of the penalty will be deposited in the State Water Resources Control Board's Cleanup and Abatement Account. The remaining funds will be used to purchase and install the Cathedral Canyon Lift Station Flow Meter Monitoring Vault and Sample Box to detect flow variations that indicate pipe breakages and take water samples to identify pollution in the river channel and local groundwater.

"Protecting water quality for human health and the environment is our highest priority," said Cassandra Owens, assistant executive officer for the regional water board, "and often this means ensuring vigilance among water systems when it comes to maintaining their infrastructure. Directing part of the penalty to the monitoring equipment will enable Desert Water Agency to detect flow variations, identify damage and make repairs expeditiously."

The Colorado River Basin is the most arid region within California and, despite the dry climate, features two water bodies of national significance: the Colorado River and Salton Sea. The river irrigates more than 700,000 acres of farmland in four counties and provides drinking water to several million customers in the state's southern coastal cities.





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