



Water district to pay \$175,000 to resolve discharge violations

Wastewater from treatment plant in Desert Hot Springs flowed onto local streets and into drainage channel

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PALM DESERT – The Mission Springs Water District, owner and operator of the Alan Horton Wastewater Treatment Plant, has [agreed to pay a penalty of \\$175,000](#) in connection with a spill at the treatment plant in October 2020; the penalty will be used to fund a project connecting the disadvantaged community of Desert Hot Springs, where the spill occurred, to a centralized sewer system.

The Colorado River Water Board fined the district for discharging 943,753 gallons of secondary treated wastewater that flowed through a community stormwater retention basin, onto local streets, and into a drainage channel that is a tributary to the Whitewater River, threatening water quality and impacting surface and groundwater uses in the Coachella Hydrologic Unit. At the time of the spill the wastewater had only undergone secondary treatment to reduce organic matter, but not final treatment for proper disposal.

“Release of insufficiently treated wastewater has harmful impacts well beyond the area where it is discharged,” said Paula Rasmussen, executive officer of the Colorado River Basin Water Board. “And, while we welcome the water district’s willingness to direct the fine amount toward better access to the centralized sewer system for the community, we would much prefer the unauthorized discharge had not occurred. The penalty should serve as a reminder that our board will utilize all available measures to protect our water resources.”

The Colorado River Water Board and water district agreed to direct the penalty toward a supplemental environmental project to help the community of Desert Hot Springs abandon septic systems by providing new lateral connections to the centralized sanitary sewer. Ultimately, this will result in improved treatment of wastewater in the community and greater regional groundwater protection.

The [Colorado River Basin Water Board's](#) mission is to preserve, enhance, and restore the area's water resources and ensure proper allocation and use for present and future generations. It 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.