



Enforcement News

San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board
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S.F. Water Board Proposes \$290,177 Penalty, Asks St. Helena to Correct Discharge Violations

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OAKLAND – The San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) is proposing a \$290,177 penalty against the city of St. Helena for a 2014 discharge of approximately 5 million gallons of partially-treated wastewater to groundwater, which impacted local wells. Regional Water Board staff has also published a proposed Cease and Desist Order that would require St. Helena to upgrade its wastewater treatment plant. The upgrade would also allow reuse of the treated wastewater for landscape and vineyard irrigation.

St. Helena's current treatment plant uses treatment ponds to treat wastewater collected from St. Helena and surrounding areas. Over a 10-day period in January and February 2014, about 5 million gallons of partially-treated wastewater leaked from a treatment pond into groundwater. Groundwater in the vicinity and two nearby domestic drinking water wells were contaminated by the wastewater and had to be closed for some time.

Water Board staff's investigation into the treatment pond leak identified other water quality problems that need correction. On 27 occasions in the past five years, St. Helena violated the required treatment standard for the disposal of treated wastewater to an 88-acre disposal field south of the treatment plant. On 19 occasions, St. Helena also violated disinfection standards when disposing of its wastewater to the Napa River. St. Helena disposes of treated wastewater to the river during wet weather when the disposal field is saturated. The Water Board permitted this disposal under the condition that St. Helena reliably meet all standards.

Relative to its upstream and downstream neighbors, Calistoga and Yountville, St. Helena has the poorest record of compliance with treatment standards. Calistoga discharges higher quality treated wastewater from its advanced secondary treatment plant, as does Yountville, which also reuses over 80 percent of its treated wastewater through vineyard irrigation. Such reuse, even during the current severe drought, is not an option for St. Helena in large part because of its current level of treatment.

The Water Board's proposed Cease and Desist Order would mandate treatment plant upgrades by February 2021 both to (1) improve compliance with existing requirements, and (2) justify continued disposal of the wastewater to the Napa River. The proposed tasks would be required as part of the proposed Cease and Desist Order.

The public comment period for the proposed penalty assessment closes on November 2. The public comment period for the proposed Cease and Desist Order closes on November 23. After considering all comments received, the Water Board will act to approve or disapprove the proposed penalty assessment and Cease and Desist Order no later than at its January 13, 2016, public hearing. For additional information, including details on the public hearing and opportunity for the public to submit written comments, please visit <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sanfranciscobay>

The [San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board's](#) mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California's water resources and ensure their proper allocation and efficient use for the benefit of present and future generations.

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