



Media Release

Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

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CENTRAL COAST WATER BOARD ISSUES CLEANUP AND ABATEMENT ORDER TO ENSURE SAFE DRINKING WATER FOR THE COMMUNITY OF SAN LUCAS IN THE SALINAS VALLEY

SAN LUIS OBISPO – The Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Central Coast Water Board) has issued a Cleanup and Abatement Order (Order) to ensure safe drinking water for the community of San Lucas.

The protection of groundwater used for drinking water is among the highest priorities for the Central Coast Water Board. For at least two years, residents of the community of San Lucas, and students and teachers at the San Lucas Elementary School have been using bottled water because the local drinking water well is polluted by nitrate from fertilizers.

Nitrate interferes with the oxygen carrying capacity of the blood, causing a condition known as blue baby syndrome. Excessive levels of nitrate in drinking water can cause serious illness and sometimes death in infants. Infants six months of age and younger, and pregnant and nursing women should avoid consumption of water high in nitrate.

The Order requires the landowner and farm operator of Las Colinas Ranch to provide uninterrupted interim and long-term replacement water service to the community of San Lucas. The landowner and farm operator are working together with the San Lucas County Water District and Monterey County, and have proactively agreed to assist the community by providing replacement water. In addition, they are also actively collaborating with local resource and housing agencies and officials to find a long term solution to the local drinking water issues.

The Order is unusual in that it requires the landowner and farm operator to do what they have already agreed to do, and acknowledges their proactive efforts. “Normally in cases of this importance, where a community water supply is polluted, our Order would include much more extensive and costly requirements,” said Assistant Executive Officer Michael Thomas. “However, the land owner and farm operator have been proactive, and they are willing to work with us and the community, so we are not pursuing more extensive requirements or other

enforcement actions.”

The farm operator is also making efforts to reduce nitrogen loading to groundwater through improved farming practices as part of their enrollment in the Water Board’s Agricultural Order.

The Central Coast Water Board is committed to working with individuals, rural communities, farm labor camps, other affected parties, and farmers to ensure that drinking water quality is protected. The Water Board welcomes information from these parties that will help prioritize the protection of public health.

For more information about the Agricultural Order, including information about nitrate in groundwater, go to the Central Coast Water Board’s website at:

http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast/water_issues/programs/ag_waivers/index.shtml

The Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board is a California state agency tasked with preservation and enhancement of water quality.

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