



Enforcement News

Imperial Irrigation District settlement leads to water quality upgrade for disadvantaged households

\$549,000 fine will be used to provide Point of Entry water treatment

September 20, 2021

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PALM DESERT – The Colorado River Basin Regional Water Board has [settled a case](#) with the Imperial Irrigation District that will direct a major fine for unauthorized waste discharges toward a project to improve water quality for more than two dozen economically disadvantaged households.

The resolution of the case stems from 183 documented violations for unauthorized wastewater discharges from two of the irrigation district's facilities. The El Centro Generating Station and Grass Carp Hatchery, both in El Centro, accrued 155 and 28 violations, respectively, for unauthorized waste discharged between 2013 and 2019 to Central Drain No. 5, which flows into the Alamo River and Salton Sea.

The settlement imposes a \$549,000 penalty against the Imperial Irrigation District, which is calculated from \$3,000 mandatory minimum fines for each violation, based on the terms of the district's National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System permit. The settlement also stipulates that the penalty will be suspended pending the completion of a project that will benefit disadvantaged households in remote areas through the installation of point-of-entry water treatment systems.

"A number of people in our region live in disadvantaged areas with limited access to municipal treated water systems," said Cassandra Owens, assistant executive officer for the regional board. "Directing funds from penalties to projects that improve water quality for these households is a way to contribute to steady improvement on this issue."

The district will provide the design, construction and maintenance of at least 25 point-of-entry water treatment systems for households that get their water supply from an irrigation canal that delivers raw, untreated Colorado River water. Irrigation water may

contain contaminants, especially bacteria, that can potentially cause illness. The untreated water is supplied to households in Brawley, Calexico, El Centro, City of Imperial, Holtville, Westmorland, Seeley and Heber.

At a cost of \$22,000 each, the water treatment systems filter and disinfect the canal water, vastly improving the quality of non-potable water that residents may otherwise use for clothes washing, irrigation, sanitary purposes, and recreation. This water, however, would not be used for drinking water. Imperial Irrigation District has identified 65 eligible households that have requested point-of-entry water treatment systems; the systems will be installed on a first come, first served basis.

The [Colorado River Basin Regional 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.