



Enforcement News

City of Modesto to pay \$325,000 for sewage spills caused by inadequate infrastructure maintenance

Penalty will go toward project benefitting disadvantaged community

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SACRAMENTO – The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board has reached a \$325,000 settlement with the City of Modesto related to two October 2021 sewage spills that discharged more than 420,000 gallons of raw sewage into a tributary of the Tuolumne River.

The penalty will fund a Supplemental Environmental Project benefitting an economically disadvantaged community. In this case, the project will consist of the installation and construction of sanitation facilities, including restrooms, showers, laundry and other associated infrastructure, at 402 9th St. in Modesto, as part of a facility with 42 cabins to house people experiencing homelessness.

The two spills occurred in the same location six days apart, resulting in significant discharges of sewage to Dry Creek, which flows into the Tuolumne River. The initial spill was caused by a corroded sewage pipe that broke during a rainstorm, leading to the discharge of over 210,000 gallons of raw sewage. The second spill occurred during the repair of the pipe when bypass pumps became clogged, resulting in the discharge of another 210,000 gallons.

“These sewage spills have the potential to impact aquatic life and human health,” said John J. Baum, assistant executive officer for the Central Valley Regional Water Board. “A similar spill, on the same sewer line due to a pipe failure during a rain event, occurred in 2016. The amount of the penalty reflects the need to hold the city accountable to ensure sewer infrastructure is properly maintained.”

Any entity that operates a sewage collection system over one mile in length is required to enroll in the Statewide General Waste Discharge Requirements for Sanitary Sewer Systems. Among other items, this permit requires that sewer systems be properly operated and maintained to prevent discharges of raw sewage to surface waters.

[The Central Valley Water Board](#) is a state agency responsible for protecting water quality and ensuring beneficial uses such as aquatic habitat and human health for 11,350 miles of streams, 579,110 acres of lakes, and the largest contiguous



groundwater basin in California. It is the largest of nine regional boards, encompassing 60,000 square miles, or about 40 percent of the state. Thirty-eight of 58 counties are either completely or partially within the Board's boundaries, formed by the crests of the Sierra Nevada on the east, the Coast Ranges and Klamath Mountains on the west, the Oregon border on the north, and the Tehachapi Mountains on the south.