



# Enforcement News

## **Coachella Valley Water District agrees to nearly \$237,000 penalty for sewage spill**

*Money will help clean up polluted waterways*

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**PALM DESERT** – The Coachella Valley Water District has agreed to pay nearly \$237,000 for a penalty tied to a 2020 sewage spill that discharged 128,000 gallons of raw wastewater into a Riverside County stormwater channel.

An investigation by the Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board found that one of the district’s collection systems—Water Reclamation Plant No. 10—failed due to a power outage on Sept. 22, 2020, releasing untreated wastewater from a manhole for about an hour. The sewage, which spilled along a Palm Desert street near homes and businesses, contained high levels of pollutants and bacteria known to harm groundwater quality.

The district captured approximately 28,000 gallons of sewage with a vacuum truck, but 128,000 gallons spilled into the Whitewater River Stormwater Channel, an ephemeral stream that is also part of a flood protection system that runs from north of Palm Springs south to the Salton Sea. In addition to flood protection, the channel provides wildlife habitat, boosts groundwater recharge and offers Coachella Valley residents non-contact water recreational opportunities.

“Sewage spills can threaten water quality and impact both surface and groundwater users in the Coachella Valley,” said Peter Satin, Colorado River Basin Water Board chair. “This settlement reflects the water board’s commitment to protecting water quality for human health and the environment and encouraging compliance with discharge requirements.”

Under the [settlement](#) approved by the Colorado River Basin Water Board, the district will pay \$236,792 to the State Water Resources Control Board’s Cleanup and Abatement Account to settle alleged state water code and federal Clean Water Act violations. The account provides grants to public agencies to aid the cleanup or abatement of pollution, and funding comes from court judgments and penalties assessed by the state and regional water boards.

*The Colorado River Basin is the most arid region within California and, despite the dry climate, features two water bodies of national significance: the Colorado River and*





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*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.*