



Enforcement News

Colorado River Regional Water Board moves to protect groundwater quality

Cease-and-desist orders aim to guard Yucca Valley's drinking water from sewage discharges

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PALM DESERT - The Colorado River Basin Regional Water Quality Control Board in September adopted cease-and-desist orders against three Yucca Valley homeowners for failing to connect to a public sewer system and discharging wastewater into the town's primary drinking water source.

At issue are homeowners in the San Bernardino County town of Yucca Valley that haven't upgraded their septic systems by connecting to a new public sewer system. Under the Colorado River Basin Water Board's Water Quality Control Plan (Basin Plan), the homeowners had 180 days to connect to the sewer system after it came online in early 2020. Despite multiple violation notices, the homeowners haven't connected to the sewer system and are violating the [Basin Plan](#) by discharging wastewater into the Warren Valley Groundwater Subbasin, a critical source of drinking water for thousands of homes and businesses in the Mojave Desert.

"We need property owners to take the septic system prohibition seriously and partner with us to keep wastewater from polluting critical drinking water supplies," said Peter Satin, board chair. "The goal of these orders is to achieve compliance and stress the importance of eliminating the use of septic systems."

Converting septic systems in areas where sewer systems are available is a top priority for the board; septic tank discharges from households, commercial and industrial facilities have degraded the quality of the aquifer that Hi-Desert Water District relies on to deliver drinking water to Yucca Valley residents. Septic discharges cause nitrates and other contaminants to be absorbed into the soil, which eventually reach groundwater supplies. [Ingesting nitrates](#) in drinking water poses a significant public health threat, with pregnant women and infants having the greatest risk of becoming ill.

To address the issue, the board adopted a prohibition on new and existing septic systems and is now issuing cease-and-desist orders to property owners who have had access to a public sewer system for over three years but have yet to convert their septic systems.

The board contacted the property owners several times before adopting the cease-and-desist orders on Sept. 10, including through letters encouraging them to comply with the septic system prohibition. The water district also sent routine project updates and notices about the availability of the public sewer, as well as information about how to obtain [financial assistance](#).

The orders approved by the board set timelines and expectations for the property owners and allow for extensions if warranted. The property owners must submit to the board a certification of connection from the district by Nov. 11 and comply with all aspects of the septic prohibition by Dec. 1, 2024.

These orders were the first to be approved under the Yucca Valley Septic Prohibition. The board is scheduled to consider additional orders in the future. The approved [cease-and-desist orders](#) can be viewed on the board's website.

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 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.