
State Water Resources Control Board

Irrigated Lands Regulatory Program

The California Water Code authorizes the State and Regional Water Boards to issue waste discharge requirements (WDRs) or a waiver of waste discharge requirements (waivers) if it is in the public interest. Over the years, the Regional Water Boards issued waivers for over 40 categories of discharges. The historic regulations had few conditions. In general, they required that dischargers not cause violations of water quality objectives, but did not require water quality monitoring. Senate Bill 390, signed into law on October 6, 1999, required the Regional Water Boards to review their existing waivers and to renew or replace them. Under SB 390, existing regulations not reissued automatically expired on January 1, 2003. To comply with SB 390, the Regional Water Boards adopted WDRs or revised waivers to address agricultural discharges.

Discharges from agricultural lands include irrigation runoff, flows from tile drains, and storm water runoff. These discharges can affect water quality by transporting pollutants including pesticides, sediment, nutrients, salts (including selenium and boron), pathogens, and heavy metals from cultivated fields into surface waters. Many surface water bodies are impaired because of pollutants from agricultural sources. Groundwater bodies are also impacted from elevated concentrations of pesticides, nitrates, and salts. Statewide, approximately 510,000 acres of lakes/reservoirs and 9,500 miles of rivers/streams are identified on the 303(d) list as being impaired by irrigated agriculture. Of these, approximately 2,800 miles, or approximately 28%, are identified as impaired by pesticides.

To control the effects of discharges from irrigated agricultural lands, the Regional Water Quality Control Boards adopted WDRs or conditional waivers to growers. The San Francisco Bay, Central Valley, Colorado River Basin, and San Diego Regions adopted WDRs. The Central Coast, Los Angeles, and Santa Ana Regions adopted waivers. The North Coast and Lahontan Regions are in the process of developing orders.

There is an estimated 7.9 million acres of irrigated agriculture and approximately 60,500 farm operations in the State of California. The State and Regional Water Boards will continue working with the agricultural community to protect and improve water quality. Water Board staff use a comprehensive outreach and education approach that engages stakeholders and encourages program participation in each region. For more information on the regional programs, please visit Regional Water Board internet pages on the [Water Boards website](#).

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