

FORT ORD ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE NETWORK, INC.

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JANUARY 3, 2010, 5pm

To, Angela Schroeter/ Howard Kolb
Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board
Via E-mail: AgOrder@waterboards.ca.gov, or Fax: 805 543 0397.

Subject: SUPPORT WITH ESSENTIAL AMENDMENTS for the Central Coast Regional Board's 2011 [November] Draft Conditional Waiver for Irrigated Agricultural Discharges

Dear Regional Water Quality Control Board Members:

Thank you for the opportunity to continue to provide public comments on the Central Coast's 2011 Draft Recommendations for a Conditional Waiver for Irrigated Agricultural Discharges, released on November 19, 2010. Oh behalf of the **FORT ORD ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE NETWORK, INC.**,

Since its inception, FOEJN has advocated for the participation of disenfranchised communities in the activities and decisions made regarding the cleanup of toxins, contaminated groundwater, 8,000 acres of military munitions and other contaminants that cause adverse health affects to impacted residents in and around Fort Ord, the Monterey Peninsula, the State of California and beyond. Water free from Agriculture run-off is a priority and must be restored at any cost.

Outreach to low-income and disenfranchised community members and organizations should not be neglected. The accomplishment of Environmental Justice should bring balance in the distribution of resources, involvement and participation, funding and a real show of care for those who are constantly left out of the decision making processes.

FOEJN also strives to involve low-income residents, as well as local residents in reuse plans, and economic development recovery efforts.

We are also involved in the clean-up of Fort Ord, an Army post that has been in existence since 1917, in the Monterey Peninsula of California, was decommissioned in 1991. This former Army base, like many military installations across the country, houses environmentally contaminated sites, due to past environmental practices of the Department of Defense (DOD).

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) has listed Fort Ord on the National Priorities List (NPL), as one of the most contaminated Superfund sites.

we applaud your prioritization of this critical program that must protect and restore the quality of the Central Coast region's water.

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The 2011 Draft Order's Executive Summary states that, "discharges of waste associated with agricultural discharges (e.g., pesticides, sediment, nutrients) are a major cause of water pollution in the Monterey County and Central Coast region. The water quality impairments are well documented, severe and widespread." (Pg 7, Staff Report)

It has been mandated that the Central Coast Water Board has the "statutory responsibility to protect water quality and beneficial uses such as drinking water and aquatic life habitat... The Central Coast Water Board regulates discharges of waste to the region's surface water and groundwater to protect the beneficial uses of the water. In some cases, such as the discharge of nitrate to groundwater, the Water Board is the principle state agency with regulatory responsibility for coordination and control of water quality." (Pg 11, Staff Report) It is also clear that, "no industry or individual has a legal right to pollute and degrade water quality, while everyone has a legal right to clean water." (Pg 13, Staff Report)

This is especially important since groundwater contamination from nitrates severely impacts domestic drinking water supplies in the Central Coast region. The 2011 Draft Order Staff Report reports that, "thousands of people rely on public supply wells with unsafe levels of nitrate and other pollutants. Excessive nitrate concentration in drinking water is a significant public health issue." (Pg 33, Staff Report) Domestic wells (wells supplying one to a few households) are typically shallower than public supply wells. Based on the limited data available, the number of domestic wells that exceed the nitrate drinking water standard is likely in the range of hundreds to thousands in the Central Coast Region.

I spoke at the workshop held at San Luis Obispo on May 12, 2010. I talked about having to travel all the way to San Luis Obispo to find out about how bad the Nitrate problem from AG run-off is for Monterey County. I talked about the lack of information sharing, outreach, involvement, funding and consideration for even organizations like ours in an inclusionary process. FOEJN provides a voice for disenfranchised communities, as well as dissimulation of information critical for the well being of our communities. Wherever a just system is not in place to provide care and involvement to everyone impacted by the decision of others, it presents an environmental Justice imbalance. By calling this an Environmental Justice problem does not fix the problem. It only creates an opportunity to make the funding that are available to address Environmental injustices available for the same cities, groups and agencies who claim that they are the experts on this topic of Environmental Justice.

The report was repeatedly shown that water quality in the Central Coast is an environmental justice issue, and that water contamination severely hampers drinking water and human health of communities, especially poorer communities, farm-worker camps, etc. It was also repeatedly expressed that the economic and human health costs to society and to communities of nitrate contamination are very high, yet the polluters have been going scot-free.

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Achieving Environmental Justice in this process or any other is crucial when it involves such a broad range of communities, races, cultures, and different ways of disseminating information. We need change and sincere efforts to bring our communities into decision making processes.

Thank you,

LeVonne Stone, Executive Director
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