

CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
CENTRAL VALLEY REGION

ADMINISTRATIVE CIVIL LIABILITY ORDER R5-2016-XXXX

IN THE MATTER OF

WILLIAM R. SINKS ET AL.
MADERA COUNTY

This Order is issued pursuant to California Water Code section 13323¹ to William R. Sinks et al. (Sinks or Discharger) for failing to submit a Report of Waste Discharge (RoWD) as required by Water Code section 13260.

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Valley Region (Central Valley Water Board or Board) finds the following:

1. Irrigated lands in the Central Valley Region that discharge irrigation return flows or storm water may contribute, or have the potential to contribute waste to ground and/or surface waters. The term "waste" is broadly defined in Water Code section 13050, subdivision (d), and includes runoff of sediment or agricultural chemicals. The term "waters of the state" includes all surface water and groundwater within the state. (Wat. Code, § 13050(e).) The Central Valley Water Board is required to regulate the amount of waste that may be discharged to waters of the state. (Wat. Code, § 13263.)
2. Attachment E of the Waste Discharge Requirements General Order for Growers within the Eastern San Joaquin River Watershed that are Members of the Third-Party Group (Order R5-2012-0116-R1) defines "irrigated lands" as "land irrigated to produce crops or pasture for commercial purposes; nurseries; and privately and publicly managed wetlands."
3. Central Valley Water Board staff developed a list of landowners in Madera County, including Sinks, that were likely to be discharging wastewater from irrigated lands to waters of the state and did not have regulatory coverage under waste discharge requirements (i.e., permits) or waivers of waste discharge requirements.
4. In developing this list, Central Valley Water Board staff used county assessor data and geographical land use data (i.e., the California Department of Conservation Farmland Mapping and Monitoring Program (FMMP) land use data) to assist in identifying potential discharges of agricultural wastewater to waters of the state and to identify owners and operators of agricultural lands who may not have complied with the California Water Code. Both data sets were used to develop lists of parcels for which Water Code section 13260 Directive Letters were issued

¹ All references are to the California Water Code unless otherwise noted.

that require parcel owners to obtain regulatory coverage for commercial irrigated lands.

5. Evaluation of county assessor and FMMP data indicates that Sinks owns approximately 154 acres of agricultural land in Madera County (Madera County Assessor's parcel number 023-110-004).
6. On 20 February and 18 April 2013, the Central Valley Water Board issued notices to the Discharger describing new water quality regulations and actions available to comply with the regulations. The Discharger did not obtain regulatory coverage and did not contact the Board.
7. On 19 July 2013, staff conducted an inspection of parcel 023-110-004 and found evidence of a commercial irrigated agricultural operation based on the crop grown and the size of the operation.
8. On 31 July 2013, the Assistant Executive Officer of the Central Valley Water Board issued a Directive Letter (hereafter Directive) to the Discharger, sent via certified mail. The Directive stated that, "*You are receiving this letter because, based on information available to the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, you own the following parcels with irrigated cropland, which are subject to new regulations.*" A copy of the Directive is provided as Attachment B.
9. The Directive required the Discharger to obtain regulatory coverage for their irrigated agricultural parcel *within 15 calendar days of receipt of the Directive*. As detailed in the Directive, Sinks could comply by joining the East San Joaquin Water Quality Coalition ("Coalition" or "ESJ Coalition"), or by submitting a Report of Waste Discharge.
10. The certified mail receipt for the Directive issued to the Discharger was signed as received by Bobby Sinks on 3 August 2013. Sinks did not obtain regulatory coverage by 19 August 2013 and did not contact the Water Board.
11. Because the Discharger failed to respond by the deadline specified in the Directive, a Notice of Violation (NOV) was sent via certified mail to Sinks on 30 August 2013.
12. The certified mail package for the NOV was returned in the mail with notes from the mail carrier indicating that the letter was "refused" by the recipient on 5 September 2013.
13. Staff attempted to contact the Discharger by phone to inform them of pending enforcement, but no working phone number was found.
14. On 19 February 2014, Board staff obtained a process server to deliver the Discharger with a notification letter that an Administrative Civil Liability (ACL) in the

amount of \$3,540 would be issued if the Discharger did not (a) obtain regulatory coverage and (b) initiate settlement discussions regarding the proposed ACL fine by 6 March 2014.

15. The proof of service receipt for the pre-ACL letter issued to the Discharger shows that the pre-ACL letter was received by Bob Sinks on 23 February 2014.

VIOLATION

16. On 10 May 2014, the Assistant Executive Officer of the Central Valley Water Board issued Administrative Civil Liability Complaint (ACL Complaint) R5-2014-0528 to the Discharger in the amount of three thousand five hundred forty dollars (\$3,540) for failing to obtain coalition membership or submit a RoWD as required by Water Code section 13260.
17. On 17 July 2014, the Discharger enrolled in the Coalition and paid the Coalition dues and back dues.

REGULATORY CONSIDERATIONS

18. The Central Valley Water Board's authority to regulate waste discharges that could affect the quality of the waters of the state, which includes both surface water and groundwater, is found in the Porter-Cologne Water Quality Control Act (Water Code Division 7).
19. Water Code section 13260, subdivision (a), requires that "a person discharging waste, or proposing to discharge waste, within any region that could affect the quality of the waters of the state, other than into a community sewer system," shall file with the appropriate regional board a report of waste discharge containing such information and data as may be required by the regional board. The Central Valley Regional Board implements Water Code section 13260 in the area where the Discharger's lands are located.
20. Pursuant to Water Code section 13261, subdivision (a), "a person who fails to furnish a report or pay a fee under Section 13260 when so requested by a regional board is guilty of a misdemeanor and may be liable civilly in accordance with subdivision (b)."
21. Water Code section 13261, subdivision (b)(1), states:

Civil liability may be administratively imposed by a regional board or the state board in accordance with Article 2.5 (commencing with Section 13323) of Chapter 5 for a violation of subdivision (a) in an amount not exceeding one thousand dollars (\$1,000) for each day in which the violation occurs. Civil liability shall not be imposed by the regional board pursuant to this section if the state board has imposed liability against the same person for the same violation.

22. Pursuant to Water Code section 13327, in determining the amount of civil liability, the Central Valley Water Board shall take into consideration the nature, circumstance, extent, and gravity of the violation or violations, whether the discharge is susceptible to cleanup or abatement, the degree of toxicity of the discharge, and, with respect to the violator, the ability to pay, the effect on ability to continue in business, any voluntary cleanup efforts undertaken, any prior history of violations, the degree of culpability, economic benefit or savings, if any, resulting from the violation, and other matters as justice may require.
23. On 17 November 2010, the State Water Board adopted Resolution No. 2009-0083 amending the Water Quality Enforcement Policy (Enforcement Policy). The Enforcement Policy was approved by the Office of Administrative Law and became effective on 20 May 2010. The Enforcement Policy establishes a methodology for assessing administrative civil liability. The use of this methodology addresses the factors that are required to be considered when imposing an administrative civil liability as outlined in Water Code section 13327.
24. This administrative civil liability was derived from the use of the penalty methodology in the Enforcement Policy, as explained in detail in Attachment A. The proposed civil liability takes into account such factors as the Discharger's culpability, history of violations, ability to pay and continue in business, and other factors as justice may require.
25. **Maximum and Minimum Penalties.** As described above, the statutory maximum penalty under Water Code section 13261, subdivision (b)(1) is \$1,000 per day of violation. As of the date of the ACL Complaint, the Discharger was out of compliance for 34 days, thus resulting in a maximum penalty of \$265,000. The Enforcement Policy recommends that the minimum liability imposed be at least ten percent higher than the economic benefit so that liabilities are not construed as the cost of doing business and so that the assessed liability provides a meaningful deterrent to future violations. The economic benefit to the Discharger resulting from the failure to enroll under Order R5-2013-0120 is \$31 (see Attachment A for how this was derived). Per the Enforcement Policy, the minimum penalty is the economic benefit plus ten percent (\$100).
26. Notwithstanding the issuance of this ACL Order, the Central Valley Water Board retains the authority to assess additional penalties for violations of the Water Code that may subsequently occur.
27. Issuance of this Administrative Civil Liability Order is an enforcement action, and is therefore exempt from the provisions of the California Environmental Quality Act (Pub. Resources Code, § 21000 et seq.), in accordance with California Code of Regulations, title 14, section 15321, subdivision (a)(2).

28. This Order is effective and final upon issuance by the Central Valley Water Board. Payment must be received by the Central Valley Water Board no later than thirty (30) days from the date on which this Order is issued.
29. In the event that the Discharger fails to comply with the requirements of this Order, the Executive Officer or her delegee is authorized to refer this matter to the Attorney General's Office for enforcement.
30. Any person aggrieved by this action of the Central Valley Water Board may petition the State Water Board to review the action in accordance with Water Code section 13320 and California Code of Regulations, title 23, sections 2050 and following. The State Water Board must receive the petition by 5:00 p.m., 30 days after the date that this Order becomes final, except that if the thirtieth day following the date that this Order becomes final falls on a Saturday, Sunday, or state holiday, the petition must be received by the State Water Board by 5:00 p.m. on the next business day. Copies of the law and regulations applicable to filing petitions may be found on the Internet at: http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/public_notices/petitions/water_quality or will be provided upon request.

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT:

1. William R. Sinks shall be assessed an Administrative Civil Liability in the amount of three thousand five hundred forty dollars (\$3,540).
2. Payment shall be made no later than 30 days from the date of issuance of this Order by check payable to the *State Water Pollution Cleanup and Abatement Account*, and shall have the number of this order written upon it.

I, PAMELA C. CREEDON, Executive Officer, do hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true, and correct copy of an Order issued by the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Central Valley Region.

Pamela C. Creedon
Executive Officer

Date

Attachment A: Penalty Calculation Methodology