



# California Regional Water Quality Control Board

## Central Coast Region



Linda S. Adams  
Secretary for  
Environmental  
Protection

Internet Address: <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/centralcoast>  
895 Aerovista Place, Suite 101, San Luis Obispo, California 93401  
Phone (805) 549-3147 • FAX (805) 543-0397

Arnold Schwarzenegger  
Governor

September 4, 2007

Lance Rennka  
Facility Manager  
Ventana Inn & Spa  
Highway #1 South  
Big Sur, CA 93920

**RE: NOTICE OF VIOLATION; VENTANA INN & SPA, BIG SUR, MONTEREY COUNTY – WASTE DISCHARGE REQUIREMENTS ORDER NO. R3-2002-0032 (WDID NO. 3271021001)**

Central Coast Water Board staff reviewed your monthly monitoring reports and conducted a joint agency site inspection with the Monterey County Environmental Health department on July 10, 2007. Water Board staff noted numerous violations of your Waste Discharge Requirements Order No. R3-2002-0032 (Order). The violations include failure to report a failing septic system and implement timely repairs, incomplete reporting and failure to conduct required monitoring, failure to complete required system repairs and upgrades, unsafe site conditions, poor maintenance, and inadequate operations and management staffing.

Your monthly monitoring reports indicate an ongoing leachfield failure at disposal area number 5 (Homestead House) since prior to January 2007. The monthly monitoring reports indicate domestic wastewater has been observed in an open pit adjacent to the septic tank riser and the tank has been pumped out on a regular basis. Paragraph F.1 of Monitoring and Reporting Program No. R3-2002-0032 (MRP) requires verbal reporting within 24 hours of observing non-compliance potentially endangering public health or the environment. A written report describing the violation and corrective measures is due within five days from the time you become aware of the violation. Septic system failures should also be reported immediately to the Monterey County Environmental Health Department, with follow-up in a reasonable time frame to replace or repair the failing system under County permit and inspection oversight. The County and our agency were not notified of the failing system other than via the regularly submitted monthly monitoring reports to our agency. Water Board and Monterey County staff Matthew Keeling and Roger Van Horn, respectively, observed the failing septic system during a July 10, 2007 site inspection. During a July 16, 2007 telephone discussion between you and Matthew Keeling, you stated that you are currently contracting with a local consultant to conduct the necessary permitting and repairs to the Homestead House septic system. Please note that frequent pumping is not a long-term remedy for failing septic systems and should only be conducted as an interim measure until the system is replaced or repaired.

*California Environmental Protection Agency*



EO REPORT ATTACHMENT 1  
OCTOBER 19, 2007 MEETING  
BOARD NOV LTR DTD 9/4/07

Monterey County and Water Board staff noted several other violations and areas of concern during the July 10, 2007 site inspection. Please address the following immediately:

1. Staff observed open excavations around the staff housing distribution box and Homestead House septic tank. Complete the necessary repairs and fill the excavations at these locations.
2. Staff observed multiple issues at the 30,000 gallon storage tank near the inn/spa:
  - Riser caps are not secure and need to be locked down at all times with compatible fasteners to prevent intrusion, overflow, and accidental entry.
  - Unsheathed power and telemetry wiring was observed running on the ground in the grass between the storage tank pump riser and control panel. The wiring should be secured below ground surface in suitable electrical conduit.
  - A significant amount of solids were observed in the storage tank just beneath the riser openings. The MRP requires semiannual (January and July) inspection of all community septic tanks to measure solids accumulation (scum and sludge layers). Monthly monitoring reports from January 2007 to June 2007 contain no record of septic tank inspection. Inspect all septic tanks immediately, pump out as necessary, and provide a discussion of the observed results and activities along with your next monthly monitoring report as required.
  - The area around the storage tank and above ground electrical wiring is covered in waist high grass and weeds. Vegetation should be kept at a minimum around the storage tank risers and other associated appurtenances to facilitate maintenance and inspection.
  - A pump blow-off riser adjacent to the storage tank appears to have a discharge outlet to the ground surface. This should be directed either back to the storage tank or stand alone containment in the event effluent surcharges the riser.
3. Neither the Water Board, Monterey County, or Ventana Inn maintenance staff appear to have a complete set of as-built drawings for the numerous septic systems at the facility. We required as-built drawings for the entire facility by January 14, 2005 per our December 13, 2004 letter<sup>1</sup>. Please provide as built drawings for the entire facility to our agency and County Health immediately. The drawings should be dated and stamped "as-built" to differentiate from any existing construction drawings.
4. The water level sensors and remote telemetry systems for the new leachfields downslope from the domestic water well, storage and treatment facility have not been installed. The February 2, 2005 and March 25, 2005 Ensitu Engineering

---

<sup>1</sup> Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, December 13, 2004 letter re: Status Request for Wastewater System Upgrades, Ventana Inn, Big Sur, Monterey County

reports<sup>2</sup> list this proposed modification as outstanding, along with several other items including: a tank for staff housing, upgrades to the Sur House tank and leachfield, and the rehabilitation of leachfields serving the inn complex. We have no record of these items being completed. Per our March 30, 2004 letter<sup>3</sup>, Ventana Inn agreed to complete these activities by June 1, 2004. Please complete these activities and/or provide documentation certifying their completion.

5. Review of the monitoring reports and discussion with you and the former maintenance manager (chief engineer), Alfred Florez, indicate wastewater system operation and management is currently being conducted on an infrequent basis by a plumbing contractor and there are no on-site personnel with requisite training or operator certification. The size, complexity and limitations of the Ventana Inn wastewater system warrant an increased level of operation and management via properly trained and certified fulltime onsite staff. Two certified onsite staff should be available for system operation and management to provide backup. Although we strongly recommend onsite operator certified staff, trained but non-certified onsite staff may be supplemented with a certified contract operator who regularly inspects the system and directly supervises the onsite staff. Please implement facility operation and management via a certified WWTP operator - Grade II minimum. Please note that operator(s) in training (OIT) need to be under the direct supervision of an operator with a certificate of equal or higher grade and requisite experience. As such, you will need to hire a contract operator while your staff are being certified and during their initial OIT phase. The following is a link to the State of California operator certification program for additional information:

<http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/cwphome/opcert/index.html>

6. Water Board and Monterey County staff observed septic tank pumping activities in the campground and other areas during the July 10 inspection. At this time, the former maintenance manager, Alfred Florez, indicated regular pumping (every couple of weeks) of the bathhouse septic tanks was being conducted as preventative maintenance. Although a good idea, frequent pumping should not be necessary for properly operating septic systems. This activity indicates the existing systems are unable to handle existing flows and are potentially in need of additional repairs or modifications. Per section B (Septic Tank Inspection) of the MRP you are required to keep a log of all septic tank cleanings (pumping). Please provide an ongoing pump out log for all facility septic tanks as part of your future monthly monitoring reports.

The last several years of monthly monitoring reports are deficient in many areas. Reporting deficiencies include failure to report various flow monitoring, septic tank

<sup>2</sup> Ensitu Engineering, February 2, 2005 report re: Status Report of Wastewater System Upgrades, Ventana Inn RWQCB Order Number R3-2002-0032, ID Number 3 271021001

Ensitu Engineering, March 25, 2005 report re: 156-03 Ventana Inn RWQCB Order Number R3-2002-0032 ID Number 3 271021001

<sup>3</sup> Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board, March 30, 2004 letter re: Notice of Violation and Request to Upgrade Wastewater System, Ventana Inn, Big Sur, Monterey County

inspection and cleaning, disposal area inspection, and receiving water monitoring data. Section E (Receiving Water Monitoring) of the MRP requires the development and submittal of a plan by June 28, 2002, to implement groundwater monitoring along Post Creek (receiving water monitoring). We have no record of receiving the required plan or any water quality data. Please review your Order and associated MRP requirements to verify the requirements and come into compliance. An electronic copy of Waste Discharge Requirements Order No. R3-2002-0032 was sent to you via electronic mail on July 16, 2007. Please contact us if you require an additional copy or have any questions.

Please submit a report to us and Monterey County by no later than December 31, 2007 documenting the following:


1. Completion of repairs/upgrades to the Homestead House septic tank and leachfield system.
2. Completion of repairs to and backfilling of open excavation around staff housing distribution box.
3. Completion of activities addressing multiple issues regarding 30,000 gallon storage tank as noted above.
4. A tabulated list of pumping records for the last four years. The table shall include a chronological list of the pumping dates and volumes for each tank.
5. The implementation of properly trained and certified staff for operation and management of the wastewater system as noted above.
6. A standard monthly monitoring report template addressing all aspects of the required monitoring. The Ensitu Engineering September 2002 Monitoring Program and Operations and Maintenance Manual already contains templates for various aspects of the monitoring requirements – please expand on the type of data tables presented in this document.
7. A full set of as-built wastewater treatment and disposal facility drawings for Ventana Inn staff, Monterey County Environmental Health, and our agency. The drawings should be dated and stamped “as-built” to differentiate from any existing construction drawings.
8. Completion of outstanding repairs/upgrades as noted above.
9. A groundwater monitoring plan per section E of the MRP.

Items numbered one through six above are required pursuant to Section 13267 of the California Water Code as of the date of this letter. Items numbered seven through nine above were previously required pursuant to Section 13267 of the California Water Code as noted in the previous discussion of violations. The evidence that supports the request for this information includes previous Ventana Inn correspondence and inspections by Water Board staff. Additional information may be found in our public file on this matter. Failure to submit the required report containing these items in a timely manner may subject Ventana Inn to civil liability of up to \$1000 per day in accordance with Section 13268 of the California Water Code.

Water Board staff will not recommend further enforcement action if the Discharger submits the required information by **December 31, 2007**. Failure to comply with this deadline may subject the discharger to enforcement action, including administrative civil liability, based on the original due dates.

If you have questions regarding this matter, please contact **Matthew Keeling at (805) 549-3685** or [mkeeling@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:mkeeling@waterboards.ca.gov), or Harvey Packard at 805-542-4639.

Sincerely,

  
Roger W. Briggs  
Executive Officer

Paper File: Ventana Inn  
Electronic File: S:\WDR\WDR Facilities\Monterey Co\Ventana Inn\NOV 080607.doc  
Task Code: 12601

cc:

Richard LeWarne  
County of Monterey  
Division of Environmental Health  
1270 Natividad Road  
Salinas, CA 93906

Melissa Silvers  
VIS Group, Inc.  
1101 Fifth Avenue Suite 330  
San Rafael, CA 94901

Michael A. G. Matthews  
General Manager  
Ventana Inn & Spa  
Highway #1 South  
Big Sur, CA 93920