



Enforcement News

Central Coast Water Board Takes Enforcement Actions

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The Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board has referred the Plains Pipeline's May 19 Refugio oil spill to the California Attorney General for judicial enforcement.

A pipeline near Refugio Beach owned by Plains Pipeline ruptured on that date. Plains Pipeline estimates that the release was approximately 101,000 gallons of crude oil with an undetermined substantial amount of petroleum reaching the Pacific Ocean. The release caused damage to marine wildlife and the environment, and triggered ongoing cleanup and restoration efforts, according to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife.

While the Regional Water Board has the authority to take administrative enforcement action on its own, this action allows the Attorney General to seek higher penalties when appropriate, and allows for more efficient coordination with other state and federal enforcement agencies. State law allows the Attorney General to seek monetary penalties of up to \$25,000 per day of violation and \$25 per gallon of oil spilled.

"The Water Board will work closely with the Attorney General's office to make sure all those responsible for the Refugio spill face the strongest enforcement measures allowed by law," said Regional Board Chair Dr. Jean-Pierre Wolff.

In a second action at its July 30th meeting, the Regional Water Board finalized a penalty of nearly \$65,000 against the Carpinteria Sanitary District for several violations of its permit to discharge treated wastewater to the Pacific Ocean. The main violation cited was an October 2013 unpermitted discharge of almost 300,000 gallons of incompletely treated wastewater. The Carpinteria chlorination system, which is designed to remove harmful pathogens from the wastewater before its discharge to the ocean, failed, allowing elevated levels of bacteria to be released.

"While we recognize Carpinteria Sanitary District's valuable efforts to reduce pollution in southern Santa Barbara County, this action should reemphasize to all of our permit holders the importance of strict compliance with their permits," Dr. Wolff said.

Dr. Wolff said the two actions demonstrate the Water Board's commitment to enforcing clean water laws in the Central Coast area.

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