



Media Release

As the federal Safe Drinking Water Act turns 50, California is poised to address new challenges

Landmark act inspired many regulatory successes in state

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SACRAMENTO – The State Water Resources Control Board today joins many nationwide in celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Safe Drinking Water Act and recognizing the lasting impact of a federal law that ushered in the modern era of drinking-water regulation throughout the U.S.

In California, the act inspired numerous pioneering achievements by the State Water Board to safeguard the drinking water supply in the state.

Signed into law by President Gerald Ford on this day in 1974, the Safe Drinking Water Act continues to play a pivotal role in protecting human health by safeguarding the safety and quality of drinking water in all 50 states.

In many ways, California leads the way in identifying contaminants and establishing health safety standards – known as maximum contaminant levels, or MCLs – that protect the quality of drinking water for 7,400 public water systems throughout the state.

“While it can be easy to take for granted a half century of progress in access to safe drinking water, this anniversary is an important reminder of the benefits of federal regulation we all enjoy,” said Joaquin Esquivel, chair of the State Water Board. “We know we have more work to do, yet the fact that today the overwhelming majority of Americans – and over 98% of Californians – do not have to worry about whether the water in their homes is safe is a prime example of how regulation, and the local, state and federal partnership that makes it work, has improved our quality of life. With ongoing challenges facing our water systems, now is the moment to recommit ourselves to this generational effort to ensure access to clean and safe drinking water for all.”

Recently, at its Dec. 4 meeting, the State Water Board adopted a resolution commemorating today's anniversary and deeming Dec. 16 Safe Drinking Water Act Day. During the meeting, Sen. John Laird's office also presented a framed copy of a [resolution](#) he introduced in the state Legislature that honors the revered act.

California drinking water has never been monitored more thoroughly for more contaminants than it is today. In recent years, the Division of Drinking Water, which in



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2014 moved from the California Department of Public Health to become part of the State Water Board, has worked to establish stringent MCLs in California for contaminants such as 1,2,3-Trichloropropane (123-TCP), perchlorate and hexavalent chromium (Chrome VI). These MCLs have significantly lowered exposure to toxic substances and reduced cancer risks and other health hazards for millions of Californians.

These human health protections are especially impactful in vulnerable communities, where costly monitoring and treatment protocols used to mean greater health risks for those living in areas with contaminated groundwater. In 2012, Gov. Jerry Brown signed the [Human Right to Water Act](#), and California became the first state in the nation to officially declare that “every human being has the right to safe, clean, affordable and accessible water adequate for human consumption, cooking and sanitary purposes.”

In one of his first acts after taking office in 2019, Gov. Gavin Newsom allocated \$1.3 billion over 10 years for the Safe Drinking Water Act, which expanded on the mission of the human right to water by seeking sustainable solutions for water systems struggling to provide healthy drinking water. Over five years, this funding has supported [900,000 more Californians](#) having access to safe, affordable drinking water.

Despite the many successes at the federal and state level, new threats continue to emerge. California is a global leader in assessing the threat of microplastics and embarking on a path to find solutions. Advancing science with microplastics detection positions California as a model for international drinking water safety efforts.

Like microplastics, the work is ongoing with per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, or PFAS, a group of human-made substances that are resistant to heat, water and oil. PFAS have been used extensively in surface coating and protectant formulations due to their unique ability to reduce the surface tension of liquids.

A team at the State Water Board has been investigating the presence of PFAS at designated locations where the chemicals would most likely be, including near airports, landfills and industrial sites. Consistent with the board’s racial equity commitment, the investigation [recently expanded](#) significantly to include PFAS testing in drinking water wells in all disadvantaged communities throughout California. The data collected will inform the immense regulatory decisions ahead for PFAS treatment in drinking water.

Find more about the 50th anniversary of the Safe Drinking Water Act, including regulatory milestones, videos and stories, on the State Water Board’s [commemorative webpage](#).

The State Water Board’s mission is to preserve, enhance and restore the quality of California’s water resources and drinking water for the protection of the environment, public health and all beneficial uses, and to ensure proper resource allocation and efficient use for present and future generations.