

## California Fights Pot Farms' Water Pollution

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(CN) - Medical marijuana growers in California's Central Valley will have to comply with regulations intended to protect nearby waters from potential pollution, state water officials said Friday.

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board adopted an order meant to protect the environment from discharges associated with legal cannabis cultivation activities. Permits will be issued to landowners and cultivators that grow medical marijuana and meet specific conditions.

"Our goal is to protect water quality and the environment from significant impacts that may occur from cannabis cultivation," said Pamela Creedon, an executive officer with the Central Valley water board.

In August, the North Coast Regional Water Quality Board [approved](#) the nation's first regulatory program to monitor the impact of large-scale cultivation on groundwater supplies.

The Central Valley order will likewise regulate discharges from medical cannabis cultivation operations to ensure that fertilizers and silt do not impact surface or ground waters.

The order was issued in response to the significant increase in cannabis cultivation in the Central Valley region, both in the number and size of operations.

Growers will be required to implement water conservation practices to reduce the need for water diversions and the pumping of ground water during the growing season. They will have to address issues such as erosion control, stream buffers, water storage and use, irrigation runoff, and the use of petroleum products and other chemicals and wastes.

Those who use less than 1,000 square feet to grow their medical marijuana will be exempt from the order.

In addition to complying with the order, growers will have to follow all local ordinances or state and federal laws.

Bob Williams, Tehama County Supervisor and officer with the Rural County Representatives of California, supports the efforts of both the state Legislature and the water board "to begin dealing with the degradation that oftentimes accompanies these larger grows in our rural counties."

"This order is a step in the right direction in assisting those counties that choose to allow marijuana cultivation, while not undermining the local authority of those counties that choose to ban outdoor cultivation," Williams told Courthouse News.

The new regulations should "also help to legitimize those legal medicinal marijuana growers who are making the effort to comply with state law and local regulations," he said.

Williams pointed out that the agricultural industry has been subject to regulations regarding irrigation discharge for years, while marijuana growers have had no such restrictions.

"If the marijuana growers want to ever be considered a legitimate industry, they first need to comply with the similar regulations and influence others within their industry to comply as well," he said.

The water board received public comments from 11 organizations and citizens regarding the regulations.

In a response to a comment encouraging the water board to expand the order so that it could be adapted for recreational marijuana growers, the board expressed its concerns that such a move could give the perception that the board "was permitting a clearly illegal activity."

However, the board agreed with multiple comments requesting that the threshold for permit coverage based on plant count be taken out of the order.

In June, the multi-agency Cannabis Pilot Project, staffed by state and regional water boards and the California Department of Fish and Wildlife, issued its first fine against a landowner and contractor.

Christopher Cordes and contractor Eddie Axner Construction were [ordered to pay](#) \$297,400 for large-scale grading that caused actual and potential harm to surface waters in Shasta County.

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