

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why was this group formed?

A. The San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) adopted rules in 2007 that require all agricultural and nursery operations to test wet and dry weather runoff for pollutants and report the test results. Growers can do it themselves or in a group. The San Diego County Farm Bureau carefully studied the regulations and decided to provide members in San Diego and Orange Counties with the option of doing it as a group.

Q. Why were these regulations put in place?

A. This regulatory mandate is an outgrowth of state and federal legislation that was passed in the late 1980's. Those laws specifically required growers to be in compliance with clean water regulations. That led to rules that require the use of best management practices to prevent pollution. The rules have now been expanded and call for water testing by growers to determine if any agricultural pollutants are reaching local rivers and streams. The testing requirement is already in place for most growers in the state. San Diego is one of the last regions to put this in place.

Q. How does the testing get done?

A. To make certain the appropriate protocols are followed to meet the Regional Board's strict reporting standards, a third-party technical firm must be hired to collect samples and conduct the laboratory testing. Sampling and testing will have to be done in every watershed in the region where there is active agricultural or nursery production.

Q. So, this group will be for Farm Bureau members?

A. Yes. The Farm Bureau is a non-profit organization and administering the group will put a heavy burden on the Farm Bureau's operations. The board of directors felt it would be unfair for the current members to provide the service for non-members as well. Membership in the Farm Bureau is open to all farmers. For the affected growers in Orange and Riverside Counties, membership in their county Farm Bureau will qualify them for entry into the San Diego Region Irrigated Lands Group (SDRILG).

Q. Why are growers in Orange County included?

A. The Regional Board's jurisdiction includes the San Juan Watershed in southern Orange County. Growers in Borrego Springs are outside the jurisdiction of the San Diego Regional Board and not included.

Q. My farm only has livestock. Should I sign up?

A. No, animal feeding operations and grazing lands are covered under a separate set of rules established by the Regional Board.

Q. My nursery is already subject to an annual fee and inspections. Is the testing mandate in addition to that?

A. Yes. Under a rule set by the Regional Board in 2001, nurseries and greenhouses were among the businesses identified as a "high priority threat to water quality" because of the intensity of use. Under that rule cities and the county are obligated to ensure that nurseries and greenhouses are employing best management practices, hence the annual fee and inspection. The testing mandate is a new and separate rule.

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Q. Why should I join a group and not just do it alone?

A. Joining SDRILG is voluntary for those growers who want to comply as a group. Acting alone is a choice, but it could be expensive. The Regional Board has created an incentive by allowing for shared costs through a group.

Q. What is meant by “expensive?”

A. Each group, regardless of how many growers are in it, or each individual who chooses to go it alone must prepare and file a Monitoring and Reporting Program. The Regional Board estimates that cost at \$7200. By the end of the fourth year of the program a Quality Assurance Project Plan must be submitted. Estimated cost: \$7200. Monitoring results from the fourth year must be followed by a Monitoring Program Report. Estimated cost: \$3600. That brings a group or individual to an outlay of \$18,000, based on the Regional Board estimates. That does not include the ongoing costs of sampling and testing. The Regional Board's estimates are \$1440 for each collection and monitoring event and \$635 per sample analysis.

Q. How will the SDRILG cover its costs?

A. There will be two structures. First, participants will pay a one-time entrance fee that will cover organizational costs and create a pool of funds that is necessary to apply for matching-fund grants. Second, when the SDRILG prepares to go into the field to take samples and do testing, an annual acreage fee will be assessed. It is not yet known what the annual acreage fee will be because the larger the group, the further the costs can be spread.

Q. How do I sign up and what will my one-time entrance fee be?

A. There is a simple one-page application to join the group. The one-time entrance fee has a built-in incentive to encourage early participation. The one-time entrance fee must be paid by each individual, partnership, or corporation that wants to participate.

\$100 per acre capped at \$500 for those joining the group by December 31, 2008

\$150 per acre capped at \$750 for those joining the group January 1 through June 30, 2009

\$200 per acre capped at \$1000 for those joining the group after June 30, 2009

Q. After I sign up, what happens next?

A. You will have to provide additional information including parcel numbers, best management practices you use, and types of crops grown. That information will be gathered from you in 2009 once it is known who the participants are. Actual testing of runoff will not begin until 2011. Until that time you are still under the current obligation to follow management measures and best management practices to prevent pollution from leaving your farm in runoff.

Q. Where can I get more information?

A. You can see the rules that were adopted by the Regional Board by going to <http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb9/> and clicking on “Waivers” and then “Conditional Waiver No. 4.” For more information about the group solution through the SDRILG go to www.sdfarmbureau.org, call the Farm Bureau at (760) 745-3023, or drop an email to sdrilg@sdfarmbureau.org.