

## Employee Training: Part 1

### **Agricultural Water Quality: Introduction**



Management of agricultural runoff has become one of the biggest challenges for agricultural producers in Southern California. Increasingly strict water quality regulations can be cumbersome and costly. Changes in the way a grower manages a growing operation may be necessary to fulfill the requirements of the laws and regulations. Although the federal laws protecting water quality are not new, there are recent changes in state and local water quality laws.

The State of California, through the Regional Water Quality Control Boards, issues **Stormwater Permits** to local municipalities. The local governments then jointly develop what is commonly called a **Stormwater Ordinance**, or a set of local regulations to control the discharge of pollutants into the storm drain system. Agriculture is included in the group of regulated businesses and activities. An annual inspection of all regulated businesses, including many agricultural properties, is conducted to determine if water

quality regulations are being followed.

The name “Stormwater Ordinance” is somewhat misleading. This ordinance regulates runoff that is not from a storm, but rather from some other source or activity, such as irrigation. The regulations prohibit water that is not from a storm or other precipitation event from entering the **stormdrain system**, or the system of interconnected street drains, ditches, streams, rivers, lakes, and the beaches. When all sources of water within a drainage area are considered, it is called a **watershed approach**. Water that enters the stormdrain system is not treated or purified in any way, but rather flows directly to the river, lake or to the beach in its polluted state.

There are numerous ways for an agricultural operation to decrease its contributions to water pollution. Some of these methods are simple, and are called best management practices, or **BMP’s** that can benefit the grower and the growing operation by increasing productivity while decreasing water pollution.

One of the requirements of the Stormwater Ordinance is for agriculture to raise the awareness of its employees, and incorporate them into efforts to minimize or eliminate runoff from the agricultural properties. These educational materials are designed to cover the topics that are of most concern, and to allow producers to have appropriate materials available for employee training.