Outlook

Preparing for a Super El Nino Winter

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This is a message from the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board.

Dear Dairy Operators,

An exceptionally wet winter has been predicted for California, due to a strong El Niño pattern that has been building over the year. In addition to the upcoming Annual Report deadlines, we wanted to reach out with some things for you to keep in mind as you prepare for this rainy season.

Pond Maintenance and Storm Preparedness

Freeboard Maintenance**:** As always, keep at least 2 feet of freeboard in above ground ponds and 1 foot in in-ground ponds. Remember to measure and document freeboard levels weekly.

Keep a Close Eye on Ponds: Alongside checking freeboard, it's extra important this winter to regularly check the integrity of all lagoon and berm walls on all ponds and retention structures before, during, and after storm events. If you notice any potential issues, like cracking, slumping, or potential overtopping, seek professional help immediately.

Stormwater Infrastructure: With the potential for sudden and intense rain storms, we highly recommend using the time in between storm events to maintain or repair stormwater infrastructure. Clear and repair gutters and other stormwater systems to minimize ponding in the livestock areas.

Land Application and Emergency Response

Land Application: Apply manure and wastewater only during extended dry conditions and ensure no runoff occurs during or after application. All applied liquids must infiltrate within 72 hours. Solid and liquid manure should never be applied to saturated soils.

Remember Your Incident Reporting Requirements: Under the permit, all adverse conditions, including pond overflowing, berm failure, or other discharges that endanger human health or the environment, **must be reported to the Regional Water Board within 24 hours of you or any ranch staff becoming aware of the occurrence**. Corrective actions must be implemented as soon as possible to stop the discharge.

Report all incidents to the following numbers:
Regional Water Board Spill Hotline: (510) 622-2369
California Office of Emergency Services (OES): (800) 852-7550

OES operates 24 hours a day. Outside normal business hours, leave a voicemail with the Regional Water Board that includes the date, time, and location of the discharge.

In addition to these phone calls, you must submit a **written report to the Regional Water Board within five business days** of becoming aware of the incident. At a minimum, the report must include:

- Date, time, and location of the discharge.
- Description of the issue and its cause.
- Flow rate, volume, and duration of the discharge.
- Current status and any corrective actions planned.

Emergency Manure Management Planning: Given the potential for an exceptionally wet winter, we strongly recommend reviewing and updating your facility's Emergency Manure Management Plan before the rainy season. We also recommend making sure that all dairy staff are reminded of these requirements and know where they can find the Emergency Manure Management Plan documents. The California Dairy Quality Assurance Program (CDQAP) provides a helpful template for this: https://cdqap.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/7_6_Emergency-Response-Plan-RB2-final-5-2017.pdf

Please remember that the Regional Water Board is not an emergency response agency. If an incident presents an immediate threat to life, health, or safety, contact the appropriate emergency response agency. This does not replace your obligation to notify the Regional Water Board and OES.

We appreciate your continued work to protect water quality and encourage everyone to take the time now to prepare their facilities for the upcoming rainy season.

Sincerely,

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Water Boards

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