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CALIFORNIA COASTKEEPER ALLIANCE LAUNCHES STATEWIDE CAMPAIGN FOR FIRST-IN-THE-NATION STATEWIDE COMMERCIAL STORMWATER PERMIT

Seven petitions filed across California seek to hold major commercial polluters accountable for toxic stormwater runoff

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Today California Coastkeeper Alliance, in partnership with local Waterkeeper organizations, filed seven petitions with Regional Water Quality Control Boards around the state. The petitions are aimed at reducing stormwater-driven pollution from privately-owned commercial, industrial, and institutional sites that generate runoff into creeks, streams, and rivers. The petitions demand that regulators require stormwater permits for facilities such as warehouse campuses, fulfillment centers, shopping centers, auto dealers, big-box stores, and industrial parks.

The petitions, filed simultaneously in San Diego, the Inland Empire, the San Francisco Bay Area, the Central Coast, the North Coast, and the Sacramento Valley, invoke known as residual designation authority (RDA) — the same legal tool used by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in November 2024 to impose stormwater permits on CII facilities in the Los Angeles area.

The Waterkeeper coalition is urging the State Water Resources Control Board to consolidate the petitions into one unified statewide commercial, industrial, and institutional, or CII, stormwater permit. A statewide permit would create uniform rules throughout California for the owners of these facilities and would also avoid years' long process of duplicative regulatory proceedings in seven different jurisdictions around the state.

“California has spent decades and tens of billions of dollars trying to clean up polluted waterways while many of the largest contributors to toxic urban runoff remain unregulated,” said Sean Bothwell, executive director of California Coastkeeper Alliance. “A statewide permit of this nature would finally place responsibility where it belongs — on the corporate facilities generating the pollution in the first place.”

Under California’s current stormwater program, municipalities bear the legal responsibility for meeting Clean Water Act standards. CII facilities generate a disproportionate share of copper, zinc, bacteria, and other pollutants that impair rivers, creeks, and coastal waters. In watershed after watershed, these properties contribute 30–60% of key pollutant loads while having no enforceable obligation to reduce discharges. California cities and counties already spend at least \$700 million annually on stormwater compliance, yet waterways remain impaired because regulators are attempting to solve a pollution problem without regulating many of the largest contributors.

It is time for the development of a statewide CII stormwater permit. If eight separate regional permits are developed, it would likely create inconsistent standards for businesses and delay urgently needed water quality protections for years. The Los Angeles Regional Water Board has already spent eight years developing its regional CII permit, demonstrating the inefficiency of a piecemeal approach. EPA has also recognized that pollutant runoff from commercial properties is fundamentally similar across California watersheds, making a statewide permit both scientifically justified and administratively efficient.

“Without regulating commercial stormwater runoff, California’s clean water goals will remain aspirational rather than attainable,” said Bothwell. “The State Water Board already has the authority to

act. We are asking them to create a practical, statewide solution that protects waterways while providing regulatory certainty for businesses and relief for taxpayers.”

California Coastkeeper Alliance filed similar petitions at several other Regional Water Boards across California today, including in Ontario, Salinas, Santa Rosa, and two in the Sacramento region. The organization is working with State legislators and has also approached the State Water Resources Control Board to encourage the development of a statewide policy and permit that would hold commercial, industrial, and institutional facilities accountable for the water pollution generated on their properties. The goal of such an effort is to require commercial landowners to make the needed investments to protect public waterways from pollution generated on private property. Potential compliance solutions include on-site treatment of runoff through nature-based solutions like bioswales and/or financial contributions by the property owners to regional stormwater treatment projects.

To receive a copy of the petition or to learn more about the statewide effort, contact Sean Bothwell at 949-291-3401 or sbothwell@cacoastkeeper.org.

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ABOUT [CALIFORNIA COASTKEEPER ALLIANCE](#) - California Coastkeeper Alliance represents Waterkeepers programs statewide as they fight for drinkable, swimmable, fishable waters for all Californians. CCKA defends and expands California’s protective legislation and strengthens the function of our State Water Board. For more information, visit cacoastkeeper.org or [@CA_Waterkeepers](#) on social media.