Still IN THE PITS

California is still failing to protect groundwater and air quality from oil and gas wastewater disposal in unlined and open air pits.

Although regulators have increased oversight of oil and gas wastewater disposal, their actions continue to fall short of ensuring protection of vital groundwater resources and air quality. State and regional regulators are still allowing oil and gas wastewater disposal in unlined pits, despite mounting evidence that this disposal method contaminates underground sources of drinking and irrigation water. The Regional Water Quality Control Boards are allowing hundreds of pits to operate with out of date permits, or no permit at all — many of which have resulted in the migration of wastewater underground into, or threatening to enter, high quality aquifers.

Policy and Enforcement Recommendations:

1. **To provide adequate protection for air and water quality, the state must impose an immediate prohibition on disposal into open pits, a recommendation supported by California Council on Science and Technology (CCST), an independent and politically neutral scientific review panel.**

At a minimum, regulators must:

2. Enforce existing water quality laws and shut down pits that are, or are likely polluting high quality groundwater, or do not have up to date permits.
3. Enforce SB 4 regulations more broadly and prohibit waste from wells that have ever been stimulated from being disposed of in pits.
4. Require complete chemical disclosure for all fluids used in oil and gas wells and require comprehensive chemical testing of produced water.
5. Ensure that the wastewater reporting mandate established by SB 1281 is fully implemented.
6. Maintain an accurate and up to date database of pits.
7. Develop guidance for the Regional Water Quality Control Boards on data collection and dissemination.
8. Include a prohibition on open pits in the California Air Resources Board's (ARB) new regulations on methane from oil and gas production, and at a minimum, expedite planned air monitoring.
9. Undertake a thorough investigation of inactive and historical pits to identify potential legacy pollution.

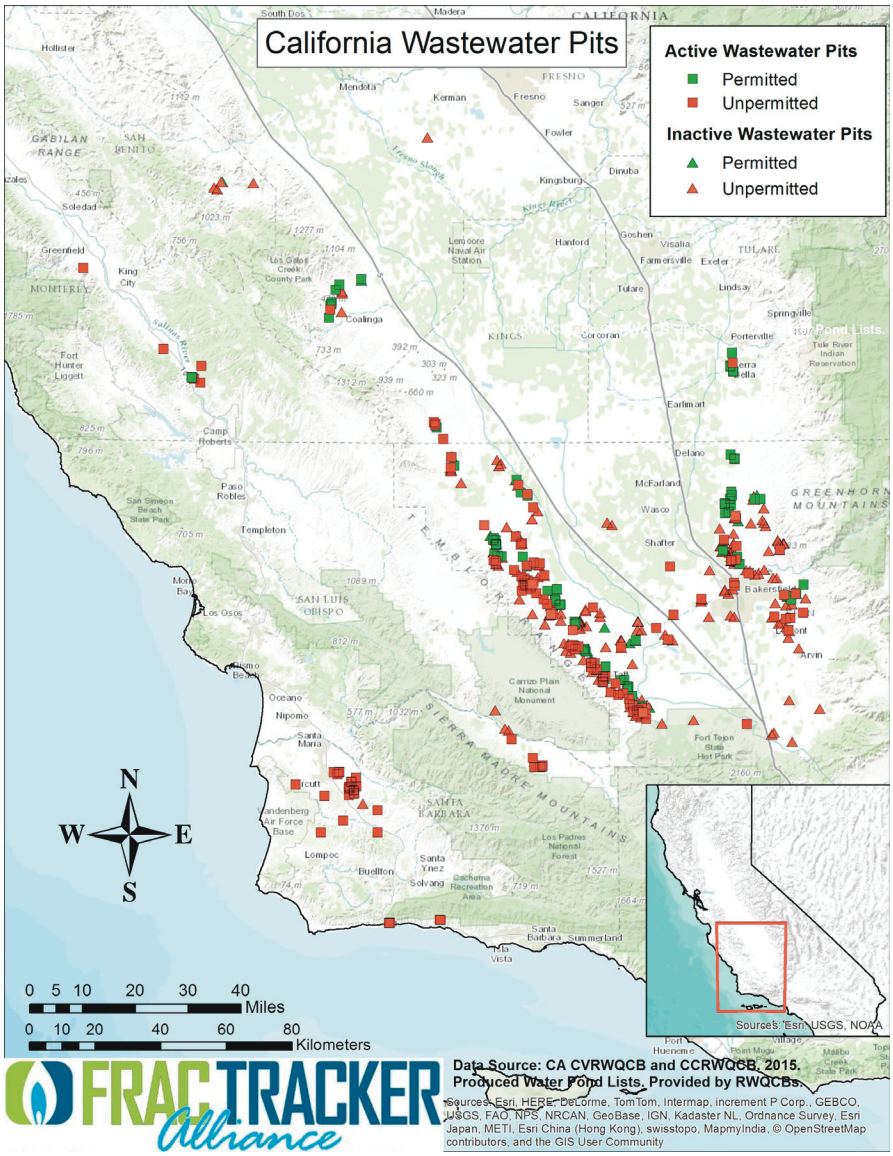
PHOTO COURTESY OF 'PISTACHIO PRODUCTION'

Aerial Photo of the Racetrack Hill pit facility, East of Bakersfield. The 27 unlined pits and spray fields (green hillside in photo) have dispersed contaminants to the underlying groundwater, which supplies drinking water and irrigation for neighboring communities.

Pits by the numbers:*

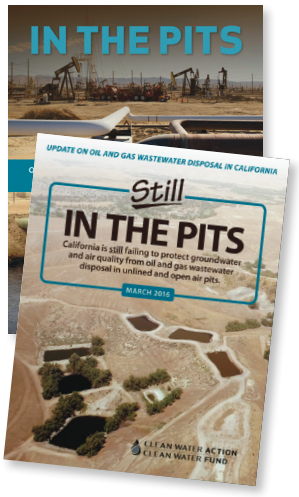
- 1165 total pits statewide. 790 are classified as active.
- 1020 are in Kern County, 673 of which are active.
- 52 pits in the Central Coast region, 40 in Santa Barbara.
- 42.2% (493) pits statewide do not have a Waste Discharge Requirement (WDR) permit. 28.9% (228) of active pits do not have a WDR permit.
- 47.9% (310) of permitted pits statewide are out of date — the WDR permit was issued prior to adoption of the applicable basin plan. 46.4% (247) of active permitted pits have out of date permits.
- 68.9% (803) of all pits are either unpermitted or have an out of date permit. 60.1% (475) of active pits are inadequately permitted.
- 462 pits, located at 28 facilities, are operated by Valley Water Management, the largest pit operator in the state.
- 732 acre feet (238,000,000 gallons) of wastewater were disposed of into pits in the latest available quarterly reporting (2015 Q2).

*All pit counts are based on reporting by the Regional Water Quality Control Boards. Produced water volume based on SB 1281 reporting by operators to DOGGR.



To view an interactive map of oil and gas wastewater pits, created by the FracTracker Alliance, visit:
www.bit.ly/CAPitMap

For more information on oil and gas wastewater pits and to read our report "Still in the Pits," go to:
www.cleanwater.org/pits



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