



**2011-2012
Madera County Grand Jury
Final Report
Oakhurst Waste Water Treatment Plant**

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Introduction:

On December 15, 2011, the Grand Jury toured the Oakhurst Waste Water Treatment Plant located at 48382 Black Oak River Road in Oakhurst. The plant operates the largest sewer collection treatment and disposal facility in Madera County. It serves central Oakhurst, including the Yosemite High School campus, and is currently operating at maximum capacity. The plant operates collection lines, the sewage treatment system, effluent storage, 2 lift pumps, 2 large retention basins, and 2 spray dispersal fields.

The plant is maintained by a crew of 5 utility workers employed by the Special Districts Division of the County Engineering Department, under the umbrella of the Resource Management Agency. This work crew maintains 1 additional sewer treatment plant and 8 potable water systems of small maintenance districts for which the County has assumed responsibility.

Findings:

1. The Grand Jury found that the facilities were clean and well maintained.
2. The Grand Jury found that the plant cannot fully meet the demand for sewage disposal service at peak usage times.
3. The Grand Jury found that the required reclaimed water quality tests are conducted by a state certified laboratory in Fresno.
4. The Grand Jury found that the plant's complete treatment process is recorded, monitored, and logged on a daily basis.
5. The Grand Jury found that the County received a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency for purchase of new heavy equipment, of which a backhoe and utility vehicle have been purchased.
 - a. The staff requires training on the operation and maintenance of the new equipment.
 - b. The equipment manufacturer(s) can provide the needed training.
6. The Grand Jury found that the assigned light vehicles are delivered to and serviced by the Madera County Central Garage.
7. The Grand Jury found that plant operators are required to have current state certifications.
 - a. Operator certifications are posted in the plant office.
 - b. The plant supervisor monitors the certification of the operators.

- c. Not all of the posted certificates were current on December 15, 2011.
8. The Grand Jury found that sodium hypochlorite is delivered to the plant by a vendor who is responsible for the storage tank and the required spill containment system.
9. The Grand Jury found that the plant is not utilizing the County's formal Safety and First Aid Program.
10. The Grand Jury found that the sludge removed through the treatment process is stored on the ground and covered with a large tarp.
 - a. The sludge is subjected to moisture seeping under the tarp.
 - b. Storage of the sludge on the ground subjects the ground water to possible contamination.

Conclusions:

1. The Grand Jury concluded that there may be advantages to having the light vehicles maintained in the Oakhurst area.
2. The Grand Jury concluded that the current certification compliance monitoring process is inadequate. Failure of employees to maintain updated training and current certification could result in public health risks and increased County liability exposure.
3. The Grand Jury concluded that failure to utilize the County's Safety and First Aid Program increases County liability exposure.
4. The Grand Jury concluded that the current method of sludge storage is potentially hazardous.

Recommendations:

1. The Grand Jury recommends that the County contract with the equipment manufacturer(s) to provide training for operation and maintenance of the new equipment.
2. The Grand Jury recommends that the County consider establishing a maintenance program to service light vehicles in the Oakhurst area.
3. The Grand Jury recommends that the process to ensure certification compliance be strengthened with additional monitoring by the County Risk Manager.
4. The Grand Jury recommends that the County implement and monitor its existing Safety and First Aid Program.
5. The Grand Jury recommends that a structure with a roof, cement floor, and stub walls be constructed for sludge storage to prevent ground water contamination.

Respondent: written response required pursuant to PC 933(c)

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Informational: response optional

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