

Initial Results of Statewide Inadequacy Assessment for California Wastewater Systems
ADVISORY GROUP SUMMARY – APRIL 2026 ADIVISORY GROUP MEETING

ADVISORY GROUP SUMMARY

Quantitative Inadequacy Assessment

Three separate Inadequacy Assessments analyzed data from the last five years (January 2021 – January 2026) and analyzed three distinct types of systems and facilities across California's 9 Regional Water Quality Control Boards:

- **Sanitary sewer systems** (946 systems) also known as collection systems, carry sewage away from homes and businesses to treatment facilities and are regulated under the Sanitary Sewer System General Order (SSSGO).
- **NPDES facilities** (265 facilities) discharge treated wastewater into surface waters, including: rivers, lakes, or the ocean under a federal permit.
- **WDR facilities** (969 facilities) discharge treated wastewater to land and are regulated under California's Waste Discharge Requirements program.

As noted in previous advisory group summaries, the criteria for the quantitative inadequacy assessments were developed in collaboration with staff from the State Water Resources Control Board and the California Regional Water Quality Control Boards (collectively, the Water Boards).

SSSGO Inadequacy Criteria

Sewer systems were flagged as inadequate if they met *any one* of three conditions:

1. Poor Spill Performance: Sewage spills are measured two ways — by volume relative to the number of people served, and by frequency relative to the miles of system pipe in the ground. Each system's spill history was averaged over the most recent 12 months and over the past 5 years. A system was considered a poor performer if it ranked in the bottom 25% of similarly sized systems in *both* time windows. This dual requirement ensures that flagged systems have problems that are both ongoing and not just temporary. In total, 67 systems were flagged as Inadequate for poor spill performance.

2. Failure to Report: Some systems showed no signs of reporting activity in state records - no reports of spills, no monthly certifications confirming the absence of spills, and no annual report on file. All three conditions had to be true simultaneously for a system to be flagged as Inadequate under this criterion. In total, 49 systems were flagged for reporting failure.

3. Active Enforcement Action: Systems currently subject to formal regulatory action such as a Notice of Violation, Cease and Desist Order, or an Administrative Civil Liability order were flagged as Inadequate, provided the enforcement action was active. In total, 12 additional systems were flagged under this criterion that had not already been identified by the first two.

Result: 128 out of 944 evaluated sewer systems (14%) were identified as inadequate.

NPDES Inadequacy Criteria

NPDES facilities are already tracked by US EPA through an assessment framework called Significant Noncompliance (SNC), which flags serious permit violations each quarter. This analysis built on that existing framework.

A facility was considered inadequate if it met *either* of the following:

- It was currently in significant noncompliance for **2 or more consecutive quarters** meaning the problem was ongoing and not resolved, OR
- It was in noncompliance in the **most recent quarter** and had also been flagged for noncompliance in at least one prior quarter in the last five years, indicating a pattern of recurring violations rather than an isolated incident.

This approach targets facilities with persistent or repeat compliance problems, rather than those that experienced a single short-term issue.

Result: 22 out of 265 evaluated NPDES facilities (8%) were identified as inadequate.

WDR Inadequacy Criteria

WDR facilities were evaluated across three separate dimensions, and a facility could be flagged as Inadequate under any one of them:

1. Effluent Quality Violations: A facility was flagged if it exceeded its permit limit for the same pollutant in 2 or more months within any 6-month window over the past 5 years. The exceedance thresholds varied by pollutant — for example, a 20% exceedance is the trigger for nutrients and solids, while oil and grease required a 60% exceedance to be counted. This tiered approach reflects the fact that some pollutants are more harmful at lower concentrations than others. 57 facilities were flagged as Inadequate under this criterion.

2. Monitoring & Reporting Violations: Facilities are required to regularly monitor their discharge and submit reports to regulators. Violations of these requirements such as failing to submit reports, submitting deficient or late reports, or unauthorized discharges, were tallied over the past 5 years. More serious violations (like unauthorized discharges) were weighted more heavily than administrative ones (like a late report). Facilities scoring in the top 25% of all violation scores were considered Inadequate. 63 facilities were flagged as Inadequate under this criterion.

3. Enforcement History: Facilities that received formal regulatory action over the past 5 years were flagged. This included one or more major orders (Administrative Civil Liability, Cease and Desist, or Cleanup and Abatement Orders), or two or more Notices of Violation. 9 facilities were flagged under this criterion.

Result: 120 out of 968 evaluated WDR facilities (12%) were identified as inadequate.

Regional Water Boards' Suggested Additions

To complement the quantitative analysis, we shared working drafts of all three inadequacy Lists with staff at each of the nine Regional Water Boards in January 2026. Regional Water Board staff bring on-the-ground knowledge of local facilities that administrative reporting data alone may not capture, so their input was an important enhancement to the findings.

Regional Water Board staff reviewed the lists and flagged any facilities they believed should be added or removed based on their direct knowledge of or access to additional data on those facilities. For facilities recommended for addition, the WWNA project team conducted an initial review and included any facility where staff provided a reasonable explanation for why it should be considered inadequate. The main exceptions not added to the Inadequacy Lists were facilities staff recommended for addition to the Risk Assessment, or those not within the scope of the Wastewater Needs Assessment (please refer to July 25, 2025, Advisory Group summaries and materials regarding the type of facilities included in the study as part of the WWNA scope). At this stage, the WWNA project team intentionally erred on the side of inclusion: when in doubt, facilities were added rather than excluded. Currently, the WWNA project team is conducting a more detailed follow-up review of all facilities recommended by the Regional Water Boards for addition or removal, examining their violation and enforcement action histories before making final determinations.

Result: 25 SSSGO systems, 14 NPDES facilities, and 82 WDR facilities were added to the Inadequacy Lists because of Regional Water Boards' staff recommendations.

Total Counts

The total number of systems and facilities identified as Inadequate, both through quantitative analyses and Regional Water Boards' expertise, was 160 SSSGO systems, 36 NPDES facilities, and 202 WDR facilities. Table 1 contains the percent of Inadequate facilities compared to the total number of facilities included in the assessment.

Table 1. Inadequate facilities compared to the total number of evaluated facilities

Program Type	Inadequate Systems/Facilities Count	Total Systems/Facility Analyzed	Percent Inadequate of Total
NPDES	36	265	13.6%
WDR	202	971	20.8%
SSSGO	153	946	16.2%
Total¹	388	2179	18.0%

¹ 3 facilities are included in both the WDR and SSSGO assessments, thus the totals are 388 and 2,179 rather than 391 and 2,182.