Print Form

Notice of Exemption

Appendix E

To: Office of Planning and Research
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

County Clerk
County of: Orange

From: (Public Agency): South Coast Water District
31592 West Street
Laguna Beach, CA 92651
(Address)

Project Title: Joint Regional Water Supply System Joint Transmission Main – Unit 3 Reach 5 Air-Vacuum Valve Relocations

Project Applicant: South Coast Water District

Project Location - Specific:

Project Location - City: Laguna Niguel Project Location - County: Orange

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project:

See attached.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: South Coast Water District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: South Coast Water District

Exempt Status: **(check one):**

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declared Emergency (Sec. 21080(b)(3); 15269(a));
- ☐ Emergency Project (Sec. 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c));
- ☒ Categorical Exemption. State type and section number: Section 15301, Existing Facilities - Class 1(b)
- ☐ Statutory Exemptions. State code number:

Reasons why project is exempt:

See attached.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Vernon Weisman, P.E. Area Code/Telephone/Extension: (949) 499-4555, Ext 3192

If filed by applicant:

1. Attach certified document of exemption finding.
2. Has a Notice of Exemption been filed by the public agency approving the project? Yes No

Signature: Vernon R. Weisman Date: 12/2/2024 Title: TRUSS CAPITAL PROGRAM MANAGER

▪ Signed by Lead Agency Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.
Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR:

Revised 2011

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December 2, 2024

Attachment to Notice of Exemption (Appendix E): Joint Regional Water Supply System Joint Transmission Main – Unit 3 Reach 5 Air-Vacuum Valve Relocations in Laguna Niguel, California

1 Project Description

The South Coast Water District proposes to relocate three existing Joint Regional Water Supply System (JRWSS) air-vacuum relief valves that are currently in underground vaults, where they have the potential to flood, to aboveground locations next to or in the vicinity of the existing vaults, consistent with current JRWSS standards. Operations staff would then be able to access the air-vacuum valves for inspection, maintenance, and replacement without entering a confined space. The existing underground vaults and air-vacuum piping connections to the water transmission mains would remain in place. The air-vacuum piping would be extended from the existing water transmission mains, penetrating each vault through a core-drilled hole, and then connected to the new aboveground air-vacuum relief valves.

Construction activities at each location would require excavation to a depth of 3 to 5 feet below ground surface and result in a total disturbed area of approximately 300 square feet. All excavation and land disturbance activities would take place within the existing right-of-way of Alicia Parkway in the City of Laguna Niguel (Figure 1, Project Sites) and on land that was previously disturbed to construct the existing pipeline, vaults, and street improvements. We understand that construction would likely occur sometime between April and October 2025. The three vaults would be constructed in sequence with construction periods ranging from three to five days with a maximum of eight trucks required at each site, totaling 20 trips. All three sites will require lane closures and will be scheduled to occur outside of peak commuting hours. The project sites are all within existing roadway with no impact to any trees or other biological resources and would require only shallow excavations (maximum of 5 feet) into previously disturbed soils.

2 Categorical Exemption

The proposed project is categorically exempt under the “Class 1” categorical exemption (CE), Existing Facilities, as outlined in Section 15301 of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) Guidelines. “Class 1” exemptions consist of operation, repair, maintenance, permitting, leasing, licensing, or minor alteration of existing public or private structures, facilities, mechanical equipment, or topographical features, involving negligible or no expansion of existing or former use. The key consideration is whether the project involves an expansion of use. One of the examples included under Section 15301 of the CEQA Guidelines is as follows: “Existing facilities of both investor and publicly owned utilities used to provide electric power, natural gas, sewerage, or other public utility services.” The proposed project involves the minor alteration of publicly owned utility (South Coast Water District) equipment (air-vacuum relief valves) involving no expansion of use.

3 Exceptions to the Use of Categorical Exemptions

Section 15300.2 of the CEQA Guidelines provides several exceptions that would otherwise preclude the use of a CE:

- All exemptions for these classes are inapplicable when the cumulative impact of successive projects of the same type in the same place, over time is significant.
- A categorical exemption shall not be used for an activity where there is a reasonable possibility that the activity will have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances.
- A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may result in damage to scenic resources, including but not limited to, trees, historic buildings, rock outcroppings, or similar resources, within a highway officially designated as a state scenic highway.
- A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project located on a site which is included on any list compiled pursuant to Section 65962.5 of the Government Code.
- A categorical exemption shall not be used for a project which may cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.

The following discussion describes why each of the exceptions to the use of a CE are not applicable to the proposed project. Because none of the exceptions precluding the use of a CE is applicable to the proposed project, the "Class 1" CE is appropriate.

Cumulative Impact

CEs, as defined in Section 15300 of the CEQA Guidelines, are projects that have been determined not to have a significant effect on the environment. As such, the proposed project would not considerably contribute to cumulative impacts in the greater project region. In addition, other projects in the region would presumably be bound by their applicable lead agency to (1) comply with all applicable federal, state, and local regulatory requirements; and (2) incorporate all feasible mitigation measures, consistent with CEQA, to further ensure that their potentially cumulative impacts would be reduced to less-than-significant levels.

Unusual Circumstances

The proposed project involves minor alterations to an existing utility within a fully developed, urban environment. It would not require the removal of any trees or other natural features or habitats. The proposed project is consistent with the type of period alteration inherent in effectively operating a public utility. No unusual circumstances have been identified related to the project sites or the scope of the project.

Scenic Resources within a State Scenic Highway

The proposed project sites are not within a state scenic highway. There are two eligible state scenic highway in the general vicinity of the project sites: (1) State Route 1 (Coast Highway), which is located approximately 2.3 miles west of the nearest project site, and (2) Interstate 5 transition to State Route 74, which is located approximately 3.7 miles southeast of the nearest project site (Caltrans 2024). The proposed project sites would not be visible from either of these eligible state scenic highways and would not be impacted by the proposed project.

Section 65962.5 of the Government Code

Section 65962.5 of the Government Code, also known as the Cortese List, is a compilation of various lists compiled by several state agencies identifying facilities or sites that are impacted by environmental contamination or hazardous waste. The proposed project sites are not on any list compiled pursuant to the requirements of Section 65962.5 of the Government Code (CalEPA 2024).

Historical Resources

The proposed project does not involve the demolition of any structures and therefore has no potential to impact any historic built environment resources. Additionally, the proposed project would involve shallow excavation (maximum depth of 5 feet) within previously disturbed soils that do not have the potential to contain archaeological resources. As such, the project would have no impact on historical resources.

4 References

CalEPA (California Environmental Protection Agency). 2024. "Cortese List Data Resources." Accessed November 25, 2024. https://calepa.ca.gov/SiteCleanup/CorteseList/.

Caltrans (California Department of Transportation). 2024. "California State Scenic Highway System Map." Accessed November 25, 2024. https://caltrans.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=465dfd3d807c46cc8e8057116f1aacaa.

SOURCE: World Imagery

DUDEK

0 412.5 825 Feet

FIGURE 1

Project Sites

JRWSS Joint Transmission Main - Unit 3 Reach 5 Air-Vacuum Valve Relocations