

Notice of Exemption

Appendix E

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

From: (Public Agency): Santa Margarita Water District
(Project Applicant)
2611 Antonio Pkwy
Rancho Santa Margarita, CA 92688

Orange County Clerk-Recorder
Department
601 N Ross St
Santa Ana, CA 92701

Project Title: Ortega Highway Widening Utility Realignment Project

Project Location - Specific: The project area associated with the utility realignment is located southeast of Palm Hill Drive and northwest of Ortega Highway within landscaped land in the City of San Juan Capistrano, CA.

Project Location - City: San Juan Capistrano

Project Location - County: Orange

Description of Nature, Purpose and Beneficiaries of Project: The Santa Margarita Water District (SMWD) proposes to remove and replace less than 1,000 feet of existing water and sewer pipelines as part of the utility realignment. The project consists of the relocation of an existing water pipelines to accommodate the Caltrans SR-74 Ortega Highway Widening Project. Project activities would include utility trenching, grading, and construction of retaining walls. Work would be conducted within a new temporary construction easement, and the pipelines would be relocated to a new SMWD utility easement. The purpose of the project is to implement the utility realignment of SMWD's water and sewer pipelines while maintaining the integrity, reliability, and safe operation to accommodate the Caltrans SR-74 Ortega Highway Widening Project. Beneficiaries include SWMD and its customers, who rely on continued safe and reliable water service. The project involves no expansion of use of the relocated pipeline.

Name of Public Agency Approving Project: Santa Margarita Water District

Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project: Santa Margarita Water District

Exempt Status: (check one):

- ☐ Ministerial (Sec. 21080(b)(1); 15268);
- ☐ Declaration 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(b)
- ☐ Statutory Exemption. State code number: Section 15282(k)

Reasons why project is exempt: The State CEQA Guidelines provide a series of categorical exemptions for projects that have been deemed to have minimal impacts on the environment. The proposed project, which consists of the relocation and reconstruction of the existing water and sewer pipelines to accommodate the Caltrans SR-74 Ortega Highway Widening Project, has been determined to have no potential to cause significant adverse effects on the environment and will ensure public safety and system reliability are maintained. Categorical Exemption Class 1 exempts "the 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, including but not limited to...b) existing facilities of both investor and publicly owned utilities used to provide electric power, natural gas, sewerage, or other public utility services". The exceptions to the issuance of categorical exemptions have been evaluated for the proposed project to further substantiate the use of Categorical Exemption, Class 1 Existing Facilities 15301(b)) for this project. The proposed realignment has been determined not to have the potential to cause significant adverse environmental effects as a result of any construction or operational activities and will not result in the expansion of use of the relocated pipelines. Therefore, the proposed project qualifies for a Class 1 Exemption.

Lead Agency Contact Person: Tricia Butler

Telephone/Extension: (909) 993-1600

Signature: Patricia Butler

Date: 10/6/2026

Title: Chief Engineer

☒ Signed by Lead Agency ☐ Signed by Applicant

Authority cited: Sections 21083 and 21110, Public Resources Code.

Date Received for filing at OPR: _____

Reference: Sections 21108, 21152, and 21152.1, Public Resources Code.

CERTIFICATE OF DETERMINATION

(If Notice of Exemption filed by Project Applicant, Project Applicant must Attach to Notice of Exemption)

1. Name or description of project:	Ortega Highway Widening Utility Realignment Project																																			
2. Project Location – Identify street address and cross streets or attach a map showing project site (preferably a USGS 15' or 7 1/2' topographical map identified by quadrangle name):	The project area associated with the utility realignment is located southeast of Palm Hill Drive and northwest of Ortega Highway within landscaped land in the City of San Juan Capistrano, CA.																																			
3. Entity or person undertaking project:	<table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td colspan="3">A. Santa Margarita Water District</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="3">B. Other (Private)</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">(1)</td> <td style="width: 40%;">Name</td> <td style="width: 50%;"></td> </tr> <tr> <td>(2)</td> <td>Address</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			A. Santa Margarita Water District			B. Other (Private)			(1)	Name		(2)	Address																						
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4. Staff Determination:	The Lead Agency's Staff, having undertaken and completed a preliminary review of this project in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the Lead Agency's Local Guidelines for Implementing CEQA has concluded that this project does not require further environmental assessment because: <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="width: 10%;">a. ☐</td> <td colspan="2">The proposed action does not constitute a project under CEQA.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>b. ☐</td> <td colspan="2">The project is a Ministerial Project.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>c. ☐</td> <td colspan="2">The project is an Emergency Project.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>d. ☐</td> <td colspan="2">The project constitutes a feasibility or planning study.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>e. ☒</td> <td colspan="2">The project is categorically exempt.</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Applicable Exemption Class:</td> <td>State type and section number: Section 15301(b)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>f. ☐</td> <td colspan="2">The project is statutorily exempt.</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Applicable Exemption:</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>g. ☐</td> <td colspan="2">The project is otherwise exempt on the following basis:</td> </tr> <tr> <td>h. ☐</td> <td colspan="2">The project involves another public agency which constitutes the Lead Agency.</td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td>Name of Lead Agency:</td> <td></td> </tr> </table>			a. ☐	The proposed action does not constitute a project under CEQA.		b. ☐	The project is a Ministerial Project.		c. ☐	The project is an Emergency Project.		d. ☐	The project constitutes a feasibility or planning study.		e. ☒	The project is categorically exempt.			Applicable Exemption Class:	State type and section number: Section 15301(b)	f. ☐	The project is statutorily exempt.			Applicable Exemption:		g. ☐	The project is otherwise exempt on the following basis:		h. ☐	The project involves another public agency which constitutes the Lead Agency.			Name of Lead Agency:	
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Date: 10/6/2026

Staff: Patricia Butler, Chief Engineer