

## **SUPERIOR ACCOMPLISHMENT AWARD**

**MARCH 2024**

**Employee:** Michael Nilsen  
**Unit:** NPDES, Redding Office  
**Title:** Water Resource Control Engineer  
**Supervisor:** Stacy Gotham, Sr. Water Resource Control Engineer

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Mike Nilsen is a Water Resource Control Engineer who has been working in the NPDES program since 2018, performing both permitting and compliance and enforcement duties. Mike has earned the Superior Accomplishment Award for his outstanding work balancing compliance oversight of a wastewater treatment plant that is experiencing severe operational issues while at the same time drafting an individual NPDES permit and two Administrative Civil Liability Orders that address over \$200,000 in mandatory minimum penalties.

Mike's case load includes several wastewater treatment plants that have ongoing compliance issues. Mike works closely with his dischargers and has a reputation for providing top notch assistance and support.

During the past year, one of Mike's wastewater treatment plants faced particularly challenging times, with aging equipment and failing treatment components. Mike has worked tirelessly to facilitate communication between the discharger and the Division of Financial Assistance (DFA) to ensure planning grant funds did not go unused prior to the fund expiration date. Mike scheduled monthly meetings with the appropriate parties to keep the project on track and consistently followed-up in writing with the discharger and DFA to ensure clear communication and create accountability amongst the parties.

In October 2023, Mike was notified that this same community services district was losing its chief plant operator, the general manager, and board members. Mike quickly responded by bringing appropriate parties together to address the possibility that the facility would be without an operator for an unknown period. He communicated with the State Board Operator Certification Program, DFA Technical Assistance Branch, and Office of Enforcement, notifying them of what was happening at the facility and inquiring if support from the respective divisions could be provided to the district.

In January 2024, after over a month with no treatment plant operator operating the facility, the district hired a new operator. Mike traveled to the site, a facility located in a remote mountain location and over three hours away from our Redding office to meet with the new operator and go over the NPDES permit requirements and assess the facility treatment plant. Numerous issues were identified at the plant and Mike quickly drafted a thorough inspection report that documented the facility deficiencies and helped the district's new board members

understand the challenges they were facing. Mike continues to be in daily contact with the new operator to provide support and assistance where he can.

We appreciate Mike's tenacity with this challenging site and situation. Mike demonstrates the qualities we seek in employees at the Water Board. He cares about his facilities and the challenges they face, works hard to protect water quality, and stays present and active during the challenges. Region 5 is so fortunate to have Mike at the Central Valley Water Board and within the NPDES Program.