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Refresco Beverages bottling plant in violation of federal wastewater pretreatment program

The local facility has accrued 39 violations and nearly \$393,000 in fines.

WALLA WALLA, Wash. — The importance of Walla Walla’s wastewater (sewer) treatment plant is difficult to overstate. It is the oldest active water reclamation plant (WRP) in the Pacific Northwest and the second largest in the state. The plant is designed to handle wastewater through a biological process — essentially using microorganisms to process the waste. Once the wastewater is treated, it is either returned to Mill Creek (December through April) or diverted for crop irrigation (May through November). The treated wastewater has been used to irrigate agricultural land since 1927. It is critical that the water discharged from the plant meet state and federal standards for cleanliness to protect the health and safety of people, agriculture and the environment.

Refresco Beverages Group is a Netherlands-based beverage bottling company with worldwide revenues of \$1.8 billion. Refresco operates a facility in Walla Walla that employs approximately 120 people. Refresco was cited 18 times in

2019 for being out of compliance with its wastewater discharge; 16 times in 2020; and five times so far this year. These violations have resulted in nearly \$393,000 in fines.

Fines usually encourage compliance; however, Refresco has been slow in taking action to address the issues. In February 2020, the city conducted a hearing with Refresco officials so they could explain why the company's discharge permit should not be revoked. Refresco assured the city they were working on a fix and would get their violations under control. In response, the city issued an order requiring Refresco to comply by a certain deadline.

Refresco's numerous violations, combined with its failure to correct these violations in a timely manner, cause the city challenges in complying with federal and state discharge requirements. The city's failure to remain in compliance, due to Refresco's continued violations, could result in the city being fined, and may trigger otherwise avoidable costs to the city and its residents.

In the interests of protecting the environment and avoiding unnecessary costs to the city and its residents, the city has issued a final compliance date of June 30, 2022. If Refresco fails to meet this deadline, its permit will be revoked, effectively prohibiting the company's discharge and ceasing operations. It is the city's sincere hope that Refresco's operations come into, and remain in, compliance with federal, state and local requirements, but the success of that system is in Refresco's hands.

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