



# Central Basin

Municipal Water District

September 14, 2011

Mr. Ashley Dunn  
Assistant Managing Editor  
Los Angeles Times  
202 W. 1<sup>st</sup> Street  
Los Angeles, CA 90012

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Commerce, CA 90040-2512

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Dear Mr. Dunn:

On September 13 and 14, 2011, the Los Angeles Times ran stories regarding a Central Basin Municipal Water District (CBMWD) communications contract. With this letter, we request that the Times run a retraction of the stories, given a number of serious errors that led to an inaccurate portrayal of the Water District and its intent. The incorrect facts in the stories were as follows:

## Board of Directors

### Division I

Edward C. Vasquez

### Division II

Robert Apodaca

### Division III

Arturo Chacon

### Division IV

Rudy C. Montalvo

### Division V

Phillip D. Hawkins

## General Manager

Art Aguilar

## Serving the Cities of

Artesia	La Mirada
Bell	Lynwood
Bellflower	Maywood
Bell Gardens	Montebello
Carson	Monterey Park
Cerritos	Norwalk
Commerce	Paramount
Compton	Pico Rivera
Cudahy	Santa Fe Springs
Downey	Signal Hill
East Los Angeles	South Gate
Florence-Graham	Walt Disney
Hawaiian Gardens	Whittier
Huntington Park	Willowbrook
La Habra Heights	Vernon
Lakewood	

- **Fact – CBMWD has a contract with Coghlan Consulting Group (Ed Coghlan, principal) to provide news content for local news agencies, as well as for CBMWD press releases and website content to ensure the public and stakeholders are aware of CBMWD programs and services.**

Mr. Allen's story indicates that Central Basin has a contract with News Hawks Review. The headline on the 14<sup>th</sup> went so far as to state it is a "news website financed by water district." In fact, Central Basin does not have a contract with the organization. This point was emphasized by Valerie Howard, CBMWD's Public Affairs Manager, during an interview with Mr. Allen last week. Central Basin has a contract with the Coghlan Consulting Group, which is tasked with disseminating information to ensure stakeholders are engaged with CBMWD projects. In this case, he utilizes advertorials in this online news group to disseminate information. The representation in the piece makes it seem as though CBMWD developed the website for its purposes, footing the entire bill for its existence. In fact, after doing some research on our end, it appears the news service was certified by Google in early 2009 – more than 18 months prior to CBMWD's developing a relationship with Coghlan. This is a critical error and the misperception it creates is stunningly inaccurate.

- **Fact – Outreach is critical for transparency in publicly-funded projects.**

Mr. Allen's story gives the impression that no other public agency is engaging in public outreach. The work conducted by the Coghlan Consulting Group is part of the District's effort to ensure stakeholders are aware of CBMWD programs and services. This public affairs effort is in line with paid advertorials run by the Los Angeles Times, PR Newswire, City News Service, Gannett and every other print and electronic news

Mr. Ashley Dunn  
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agency. In fact the Los Angeles Times specifically markets and designs advertorials to look like standard news copy. The approach is helpful in ensuring information about public programs that may not be attractive to news editors, such as water recycling programs, is still disseminated to stakeholders.

- **Fact – CBMWD has paid a total of \$70,000 for services provided by the Coghlan Consulting Group.**

Mr. Allen's story states CBMWD "is paying nearly \$200,000" for Coghlan's services. In fact, Coghlan has received a total of \$70,000 for work completed since November 2010. What's more, even if he had invoiced to the not-to-exceed amount for the existing contract, the total would not have been "nearly \$200,000." The inaccurate information, the high rounded amount, and the wording used to impart the information begins to appear as a deliberate attempt to misrepresent the amount spent. Either that or the reporter was not thorough.

The Central Basin Municipal Water District always appreciates coverage from a respected news source like the Los Angeles Times. However, we believe it is critical that the information provided to readers is accurate, and in this case, the story was not and the inaccuracies were repeated two days in a row. Accordingly, we invite your news reporters to work with us in the future on accurate stories about our water education programs, water storage plan, water recycling and water conservation as these issues are critical to ensuring water in Southern California continues to be safe, clean, and reliable. Please contact me if you or your reporters are interested in covering water issues. I can be reached at (323) 201-5500.

Sincerely,



Art Aguilar  
General Manager



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RE: "Water district taps Google for good coverage," and "Google News cuts link to news website," Sept. 13 and 14

**Board of Directors**

Dear Editor:

**Division I**  
Edward C. Vasquez

While Central Basin Municipal Water District always appreciates coverage from a respected news source, we prefer it when they actually get their facts right.

**Division II**  
Robert Apodaca

**Division III**  
Arturo Chacon

Recent stories written by Sam Allen were shoddy in their reporting, had immense factual errors, and misrepresented information that led readers to gain an inaccurate portrayal of the Water District and its intent.

**Division IV**  
Rudy C. Montalvo

**Division V**  
Phillip D. Hawkins

CBMWD does not "finance" the online news site News Hawks Review. CBMWD doesn't even have a contract with this organization.

**General Manager**

Art Aguilar

CBMWD has not paid News Hawks \$200,000 to publish news about our programs. We do have a contract with a writer who provides content for press releases, our website and for advertorials, which occasionally includes purchasing space online and in publications like the LA Times. We have paid him \$70,000 for work he has provided over the last 10 months. Both the contract and the rate is an industry standard and entirely appropriate.

**Serving the Cities of**

As a transparent organization, CBMWD works to ensure our stakeholders and constituents know about our programs. The LA Times is not known for their in-depth coverage of water issues, like industry efforts to protect water quality, our Groundwater Storage Plan, or the immense need to increase use of recycled water. It's a tough read and it's not sexy. We get it. But then don't criticize us when we purchase space or send out press releases to get this critical information into our communities. And more importantly, don't misrepresent the facts.

- Artesia
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- Bellflower
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- Carson
- Cerritos
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- Cudahy
- Downey
- East Los Angeles
- Florence-Graham
- Hawaiian Gardens
- Huntington Park
- La Habra Heights
- Lakewood
- La Mirada
- Lynwood
- Maywood
- Montebello
- Monterey Park
- Norwalk
- Paramount
- Pico Rivera
- Santa Fe Springs
- Signal Hill
- South Gate
- Walnut Park
- Whittier
- Willowbrook
- Vernon

Sincerely,

Art Aguilar  
General Manager