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FILE KERN CO. CLERK OF THE BD. OF SUPERVISORS

BY _____ DEPUTY

Kern County GRAND JURY

2026-2027

Mike Shugart
Foreman

Paul Adams

Kathi Aguilar

Steve Albritton

Alan Alexis

Stacy Arebalo

Nathan Banks

Susan Brooks Lange

Kathleen Green

Ray Grissom

Robert Hawkes

Judi House

Patti Jepsen

Todd Lucas

Joan Ott

Manuel Reyes

Adela Rivers

Jacqueline Thomas

Constance Waddle

October 20, 2026

Nancy Anderson
County Administrative Officer/Clerk of the Board
Kern County Administrative Office
1115 Truxtun Avenue
Bakersfield, CA 93301

Attention: Julie Gragg, Chief Clerk of the Board

Enclosed is a copy of the Grand Jury Final Report concerning **Ford City-Taft Heights Sanitation District** in accordance with the provisions of Penal Code §933.05(f) which states:

"A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report."

Please note that this report is confidential until public release. The Grand Jury will be releasing this report to the public on **Monday, October 26, 2026.** Accordingly, you are instructed not to disclose the contents of the report until that time.

Thank you for your consideration and cooperation.

Respectfully,

Mike Shugart

Mike Shugart, Foreman
2025-2026 Kern County Grand Jury

ENCLOSURE: Excerpt Penal Code 933

1415 Truxtun Avenue, Ste. 600
Bakersfield, CA 93301
(661) 868-4797
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2026-2027 KERN COUNTY
GRAND JURY FINAL REPORT

FORD CITY – TAFT HEIGHTS SANITATION DISTRICT

Efficiently Managing Wastewater

APPROVED AS FOR RELEASE:

Mike Shugart — 10/5/26

Mike Shugart, FOREMAN — **DATE**

Kendra L. Graham — 10/13/26

Kendra L. Graham, COUNTY COUNSEL — **DATE**

10/15/26

John W. Lua, PRESIDING JUDGE — **DATE**
KERN COUNTY SUPERIOR COURT

2025-2026 KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY

FORD CITY – TAFT HEIGHTS SANITATION DISTRICT

Efficiently Managing Wastewater

Release Date
October 26, 2026

FORD CITY – TAFT HEIGHTS SANITATION DISTRICT

Efficiently Managing Wastewater

SUMMARY:

On June 21, 1976, the Ford City-Taft Heights Sanitation District (District) was formed. In 2015, the District successfully partnered with the City of Taft (City) in a mutually owned wastewater treatment plant (WWTP). Co-owned by the City and County of Kern (County) under the oversight of the Kern Sanitation Authority and Taft City Public Works, the WWTP is the picture of efficiency, serving residents of both the District and the City.

PURPOSE OF INQUIRY:

California Penal Code §933.5, authorizes the 2026-2027 Kern County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) to examine procedures and budgets of all special districts in Kern County. The Grand Jury investigated the Ford City-Taft Heights Sanitation District to determine if it is operating efficiently and in accordance with relevant laws, codes and ordinances.

METHODOLOGY:

The Grand Jury conducted interviews with the management of the Kern Sanitation Authority, the management of the Taft Public Works Department, a representative at the California State Water Resources Control Board, and a member of the Kern County Board of Supervisors. The Grand Jury visited the wastewater treatment plant, reviewed documents and ordinances related to the WWTP, and conducted internet research.

DISCUSSION OF FACTS:

Ford City originated as an oil boom town located north of Taft. It was named after the abundance of Ford Model T cars in town in the 1920s. Taft Heights is located southwest of Taft and was originally called Boust City in honor of the oilman, E. J. Boust, who founded the town. It was renamed Taft Heights in the 1950s.

The District is a dependent district governed by the Kern County Board of Supervisors. In June 2015, the City of Taft and the Kern Sanitation Authority entered into an agreement for the operation of the wastewater treatment facility. The City owns 52% of the wastewater treatment plant and Kern County owns 48%. Both entities share the financial responsibility of the WWTP. Further, the City contracts with the County for the City's share of the operation of the WWTP. This is currently performed by the Kern County Public Works Department.

Both the City and the District follow California Proposition 218, which limits the government authority to impose taxes for property-related fees without voter consent. These fees are collected via property taxes and new construction connection fees. Currently, the annual charge for sewer service to a single-family residence in the District is $545.25, which is comparable to rates in the City of Taft. After experiencing breaches in the sewer system, which could have resulted in multi-million-dollar fines from the State of California, safeguards including flow meters were installed.



Flow meter to detect a breach in the sewer system
Picture from Smartcoversystems.com

The capacity for the WWTP is approximately 1.4 million gallons of wastewater per day. The WWTP currently processes approximately 800,000 gallons per day; this allows for substantial growth potential. The incoming wastewater is screened for non-biodegradable debris which is removed by an auger system. Augers are spiral-shaft devices that compact and convey solids from screening or grinding units for disposal. This helps plants run more efficiently and with less downtime.



Auger located at wastewater treatment plant
Picture taken by Grand Jury

After processing, the effluent (liquid waste) is discharged to 135 acres of an alfalfa field adjacent to the plant, which provides a small return (approximately $10,000 annually) to the WWTP. The alfalfa field is owned by the City of Taft and contracted to a farmer. The residual sludge is processed into dry solid waste and is trucked to a fertilizer plant at a cost to the WWTP. The sludge removal process was improved upon by the current operator saving the WWTP approximately $100,000 per year. Approximately eight years ago, the WWTP was upgraded with a $3.6 million USDA Rural Development Loan, which was a considerable savings from the $35 million estimate to rebuild the entire facility.

The sewer collection system for the WWTP is gravity fed, except for two lift (pump) stations; one in the City and one in the District. The operational condition of the stations is monitored regularly. There are back-up plans for any power outages. Areas below the WWTP elevation flow into a sump and when the sump reaches a certain capacity the sewage is lifted to the gravity main line.

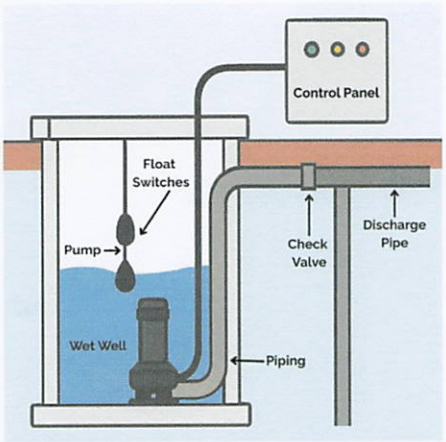


Diagram of lift station for wastewater sewage
Diagram from Clrblu.com

In September 2011, the City of Taft entered into a contract with a solar company to install a solar facility, which sells all power produced to the City. Management has expressed this contract is ambiguous and confusing as to any financial benefit to the WWTP. The contract will expire in 2031.

The District received $6.6 million from the Federal American Recovery Act, which was spent on sewer line replacement within the District. Although the work was completed in 2026, the Bureau of Land Management must sign off on the project. At that time, the Notice of Completion will be filed.

FINDINGS:

F1. The 2026-2027 Kern County Grand Jury finds the current solar contract with the City of Taft is not beneficial to the WWTP.

F2. The 2026-2027 Kern County Grand Jury finds the 135 acres of alfalfa currently owned by the City of Taft is adequately handling the 800,000 gallons a day discharge from the WWTP. If the discharge exceeds the State permitted 1.5 million gallons a day, extensive improvements must be made to the WWTP to bring the effluent into compliance per the California State Water Resources Control Board. This could permit the possible discharge into Sandy Creek.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The 2026-2027 Kern County Grand Jury recommends:

R1. By January 1, 2028, the Ford City-Taft Heights Sanitation District and the City of Taft should consider advantageous solar options to power the wastewater treatment plant, since the current solar contract will expire in 2031. (Finding F1)

R2. By January 1, 2028, the Ford City-Taft Heights Sanitation District and the City of Taft should formulate a contingency plan to allow discharge of effluent into Sandy Creek, or alternative options. (Finding F2)

COMMENTS:

The 2026-2027 Kern County Grand Jury would like to thank the management of the Taft Public Works Department, the Kern Sanitation Authority, and the California State Water Resources Control Board for their valuable information and cooperation.

NOTES:

- The Kern County Board of Supervisors and the City of Taft should post a copy of this report where it will be available for public review.
- People wishing to receive an email notification of newly released reports may sign up at: www.kerncounty.com/grandjury
- Present and past Kern County Grand Jury Final Reports and Responses can be accessed on the Kern County Grand Jury website: www.kerncounty.com/grandjury

RESPONSE DEADLINE:

- **REQUIRED WITHIN 90 DAYS FROM:**

  The Kern County Board of Supervisors

  The City of Taft

RESPONSES ARE REQUIRED PURSUANT TO PENAL CODE §§933(c) AND 933.05 TO:

- **PRESIDING JUDGE**
  SUPERIOR COURT OF CALIFORNIA
  COUNTY OF KERN
  1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 212
  BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301

- **FOREMAN**
  KERN COUNTY GRAND JURY
  1415 TRUXTUN AVENUE, SUITE 600
  BAKERSFIELD, CA 93301

Reports issued by the Grand Jury do not identify individuals interviewed. Cal. Penal Code §929 requires that reports of the Grand Jury not contain the name of any person or facts leading to the identity of any person who provides information to the Grand Jury.

§933. Findings and Recommendations (Excerpt)

No later than 90 days after the grand jury submits a final report on the operations of any public agency subject to its reviewing authority, the governing body of the public agency shall comment to the presiding judge of the superior court on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of the governing body, and every election county officer or agency head for which the grand jury has responsibility pursuant to section 914.1 shall comment within 60 days to the presiding judge of the superior court, with an information copy sent to the board of supervisors, on the findings and recommendations pertaining to matters under the control of that county officer or agency head and any agency or agencies which that officer or agency head supervises or controls. In any city and county, the mayor shall also comment on the findings and recommendations. All of these comments and reports shall forthwith be submitted to the presiding judge of the superior court who impaneled the grand jury. A copy of all responses to grand jury reports shall be placed on file with the clerk of the public agency and the office of the county clerk, or the mayor when applicable, and shall remain on file in those offices.

As used in this section "agency" includes a department.

§933.05. Responses to Findings (Excerpt)

(a) For purposes of subdivision (b) of Section 933, as to **each** grand jury **finding**, the responding person or entity shall indicate one of the following:
   (1) The respondent agrees with the finding.
   (2) The respondent disagrees wholly or partially with the finding; in which case the response shall specify the portion of the finding that is disputed and shall include an explanation of the reasons therefor.

(b) For purposes of subdivision (b) of section 933, as to each grand jury recommendation, the responding person or entity shall report one of the following actions:
   (1) The recommendation has been implemented, with a summary regarding the implemented action.
   (2) The recommendation has not yet been implemented, but will be implemented in the future, with a timeframe for implementation.
   (3) The recommendation requires further analysis, with an explanation and the scope and parameters of an analysis or study, and a timeframe for the matter to be prepared for discussion by the officer or head of the agency or department being investigated or reviewed, including the governing body of the public agency when applicable. This timeframe shall not exceed six months from the date of publication of the grand jury report.
   (4) The recommendation will not be implemented because it is not warranted or is not reasonable, with an explanation therefore.

(c) However, if a finding or recommendation of the grand jury addresses budgetary or personnel matters of a county agency or department headed by an elected officer, both the agency or department head and the board of supervisors shall respond if requested by the grand jury, but the response of the board of supervisors shall address only those budgetary or personnel matters over which it has some decision-making authority. The response of the elected agency or department head shall address all aspects of the findings or recommendations affecting his or her agency or department.

(f) A grand jury shall provide to the affected agency a copy of the portion of the grand jury report relating to that person or entity two working days prior to its public release and after the approval of the presiding judge. No officer, agency, department, or governing body of a public agency shall disclose any contents of the report prior to the public release of the final report.