



# ORANGE COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT

February 15, 2008

**phone:**

(714) 962-2411

**fax:**

(714) 962-0356

**www.ocsd.com**

**mailing address:**

P.O. Box 8127  
Fountain Valley, CA  
92728-8127

**street address:**

10844 Ellis Avenue  
Fountain Valley, CA  
92708-7018

**Member  
Agencies**

**Cities**

Anaheim  
Brea  
Buena Park  
Cypress  
Fountain Valley  
Fullerton  
Garden Grove  
Huntington Beach  
Irvine  
La Habra  
La Palma  
Los Alamitos  
Newport Beach  
Orange  
Placentia  
Santa Ana  
Seal Beach  
Stanton  
Tustin  
Villa Park  
Yorba Linda

**County of Orange**

**Sanitary Districts**

Costa Mesa  
Midway City

**Water Districts**

Irvine Ranch

State Water Resources Control Board  
PO Box 100  
Sacramento, CA 95812-0100

**SUBJECT: Comment Letter – Strategic Plan Update 2008-2012**

The Orange County Sanitation District (OCSD) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the State Water Resources Control Board's (SWRCB) draft Strategic Plan Update for 2008-2012. OCSD is a public agency responsible for collecting, treating and managing wastewater for 2.4 million residents and businesses within northern and central Orange County, California. OCSD operates two regional wastewater treatment plants, over 650 miles of trunk and subtrunk sewer lines, sixteen pump stations and an ocean outfall disposal system.

OCSD commends the SWRCB for their transparent and inclusive planning effort, extensive outreach to stakeholders, and continuous stakeholder input on the Strategic Plan. OCSD is well aware of this planning effort and has been involved throughout the process. OCSD staff participated in the initial public outreach session on the Strategic Plan Update conducted during the Santa Ana Regional Water Quality Control Board (RWQCB) meeting on April 20, 2007. Staff also recently participated in the discussion on the draft Strategic Plan during the *Water Quality Coordinating Committee Meeting* in Sacramento on December 10 and 11, 2007.

Stakeholder input is valuable as they provide insight on highly specific issues within a localized area (e.g., wastewater treatment standards in a sub-watershed) which may be beneficial for determining the priorities, objectives and actions for the SWRCB's Strategic Plan.

## OCSD Priority Issues

During the Santa Ana RWQCB outreach session on the Strategic Plan Update, SWRCB's staff requested that stakeholders provide input on the draft Strategic Plan and discuss any issues they consider a priority. In response to this request, OCSD is providing agency specific comments on issues that are priority to OCSD, and issues that OCSD believes will be of importance to the region and state over the next decade. These priority issues have been arranged into the following nine categories.

### 1. Infrastructure

OCSD is in the process of undertaking a massive capital improvement program that will upgrade its wastewater treatment facilities to meet water quality objectives and local policy decisions. This program will require considerable amounts of raw building

materials. Currently there is a shortage of essential materials, such as steel and concrete, which has led to higher costs.

Generally speaking, increased costs for standard building materials may restrict other Publically Owned Treatment Works (POTWs) from rehabilitating their aging infrastructure. In 2005, the Society of Civil Engineers rated the conditions of the wastewater infrastructure as a "D-." *The Society of Civil Engineers* also noted that the United States Environmental Protection Agency (USEPA) estimates that the nation must invest \$390 billion over the next 20 years to replace existing systems and build new ones to meet increasing demand. Taking into consideration these assertions, OCSD believes that aging infrastructure, and the costs associated with their rehabilitation, will be a major issue for our agency as well as other public utilities over the next few decades.

## 2. Workforce Availability and Development

As the baby boomer generation begins to retire, our agency as well as other comparable agencies will experience shortages of certified wastewater operators. This is of particular concern to OCSD which has a tremendous amount of construction and new processes coming on line in the next five years, as a result of our facility upgrades. There is currently a large gap between the number of experienced operators in the workforce and the number of the industry professionals OCSD needs to effectively maintain and operate the new infrastructure.

An industry-wide shortage will result in competition for available, experienced and certified wastewater operators. Most agencies, including OCSD, will need to proactively pursue hiring new uncertified staff and provide them with the necessary maintenance/technician and wastewater treatment plant operator training. OCSD believes outreach and industry promotion, professional training programs, and affordable workforce housing availability will be the key to attracting new workers.

## 3. Safety and Security

OCSD foresees increased safety to protect against the increased likelihood of natural disasters and tightened security at our facilities due to the global threat of terrorism. OCSD is the third largest wastewater facility west of the Mississippi with the responsibility of treating wastewater for millions of residents and businesses in Orange County. Crippled facilities due to terrorism or forces of nature would result in a major public health, environmental and economic disaster. Increase safety and security will require better planning and additional resources. Other public utilities, particularly water purveyors, will also have to increase their safety and security to ensure uninterrupted services.

#### 4. Increased Influent Flows

Increased flows from dewatering and urban runoff diversions will have an impact on OCSD facilities. Over the years, the Santa Ana RWQCB has increasingly placed restrictions on discharges of groundwater to receiving waters from construction and Caltrans projects, effectively eliminating many of these types of discharges. These flows instead have been conveyed to OCSD. The increased flows of groundwater have made a noticeable increase in OCSD's influent levels as well as increases in the discharge of pollutants. During peak wet weather events the utilization of our facilities for dewatering purposes may be problematic and impact the processing of wastewater. In addition, discharging groundwater into a POTW is a waste of high-quality water, which is particularly concerning since the region is experiencing a drought. OCSD would like the Santa Ana RWQCB to reconsider the restrictions they place on the management and use of groundwater from dewatering processes.

OCSD is also being utilized to treat diverted dry-weather urban runoff. OCSD supports having a role in managing dry-weather urban runoff; however, the concept of utilizing a POTW to always handle nuisance flows is not the most effective or appropriate management approach; and some agencies do not have the available capacity to provide this assistance to their communities. A more sustainable and water conservation-minded approach needs to be developed for managing both urban runoff and dewatering flows. OCSD recommends the SWRCB and Regional Boards take a lead in determining better management strategies for these flows.

#### 5. Pathogen Detection and Tracking

The USEPA, the state of California, the state of Illinois and the European Union are all involved in gathering epidemiological data to affirm the relationship between illnesses associated with sewage contamination of recreational waters and traditional indicators of sewage contamination, potential new indicators of sewage contamination and some new molecular methods for detecting microbial indicators and pathogens in sewage. In the United States, the USEPA is even trying to fast track approval for a new molecular method for detecting *Enterococci sp.* in recreational waters. Not only is it likely that new microbial monitoring requirements could result from these studies, but the regulated community needs to be vigilant about applicability of any molecular detection method to receiving water permit compliance. Preliminary indications are that the current molecular methods are detecting dead organisms.

In conjunction with the epidemiological study work, there is also significant effort being expended on microbial source identification. This research is trying to differentiate between human and non-human sources of receiving water contamination. The

underlying hypothesis is that there will be a difference in the relationship between water-related illnesses associated with recreational contact when the contamination is human sewage vs. non-human sewage. This research could also have an impact on receiving water monitoring requirements.

OCSD believes that the new microbial methods for detecting *Enterococci* and source tracking are premature at this time and need further testing and refinement before being incorporated as a regulatory requirement. A rush to use these new methods may result in inaccurate data analysis. POTWs will also incur extra costs and demands on resources in order to meet new monitoring requirements that aren't necessary or don't effectively protect water quality. We urge the SWRCB to continue to support efforts to develop better testing methods while recognizing that better monitoring tools will take time to develop.

#### 6. Climate Change

OCSD understands the concern over global warming and the impacts it will have on our industry. OCSD is aware that new state regulatory requirements will be forthcoming as a result of the passage of AB32. These new regulations will likely require additional pollutant controls for air quality and new processing and handling requirements for our wastewater and solids/biosolids. The intention of any regulation will be to limit climate change by reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This will have an enormous effect on all water and wastewater facilities, as approximately 20% of California's energy consumption goes toward providing water and wastewater treatment. OCSD and other water/wastewater agencies will have to adjust their management practices and facility processes to meet this mandate.

#### 7. Watershed Approach

OCSD would like to see more watershed-wide approaches to solving water quality issues. County, state and perhaps even federal entities should integrate their programs to address common watershed-wide problems. An example of an area that could benefit from a watershed approach is the management of urban runoff in Orange County. Currently, the burden of reducing beach and bay contamination from urban runoff falls mostly on the beach communities. In Orange County, stormwater and other NPDES permits are administered by two separate regional boards, and separate north and south county programs have developed rather than a consolidated watershed-wide program. During the first two iterations of the stormwater permits, the two regional boards worked together to address stormwater, but then chose to go along separate paths. Taking a watershed-wide approach could help develop programs that would reduce or treat urban runoff at the source. OCSD believes watershed approaches are the key to effectively and efficiently solving regional water quality issues.

### 8. Emerging Constituents of Concern

New research is needed to understand the scope and impacts from emerging constituents; and pollutant source control may be needed in order to address specific pollutants or pollutant groups. OCSD believes the SWRCB should support continued research to address these constituents.

### 9. Other Issues

OCSD would like to achieve or have support from regulators to facilitate or address the following actions or issues:

- Cooperation among the regulators to perfect the correct solutions to POTW water, air, and land/biosolids management;
- Utilizing asset management as part of the infrastructure management process to ensure adequate infrastructure sustainability and to meet local watershed "levels of service";
- Solutions to private property SSO issues that impact communities and surface waters; and
- Movement of the Santa Ana Interceptor Line and other brackish sewers.

### **General Comments**

OCSD is pleased with the refinement of the January 25, 2008 version of the Strategic Plan Update and believes the modifications to the *Organizational Priorities* and reorganization of the *Strategic Program Priorities* into two separate categories (i.e., *Environmental Priorities and Planning Priorities*) makes more sense. In addition, OCSD is overall very pleased with the SWRCB's *Mission and Vision Statement, Principles and Values and Desired Conditions*.

OCSD believes the SWRCB has appropriately identified the water supply/water quality nexus in its overarching framework. We also applaud the emphasis in the Strategic Plan on building a performance-based organization through identification of specific objectives and achievable actions.

OCSD agrees with the SWRCB vision of future trends particularly aging infrastructure and education. We are also very concerned about the availability of future certified wastewater treatment workers as all indications are that there will be a statewide shortage of such workers as current employees retire. OCSD agrees that developing a single clear format for the Basin Plans and commends the SWRCB for including stakeholders in the Basin Plan update process.

## **Desired Conditions**

OCSD would recommend modifying the statement under the Education/Outreach section to “*We promote knowledge and awareness and facilitation of...*” since it is not only important to convey your support for water quality related measures, but to actively help other entities achieve them through providing guidance and information and by participating in stakeholder meetings and events.

## **Overarching Framework**

OCSD recommends including Outreach under No. 5. *Education* section. Outreach implies more proactively promoting, providing information and reaching out to stakeholders in order to inform them about water quality matters and is an important mechanism for solving water quality problems.

## **Environmental Priorities**

### *Program Priority 1: Protect and Restore Surface Waters*

Objective 1.2 under Goal 1 essentially works towards developing alternatives strategies that result in waterbodies meeting water quality standards without implementation of TMDLs. Under Action 1.2.1 OCSD recommends modifying the language to include possible delisting of waterbodies that were initially listed using limited or outdated data and where recent study results don't support the listing for a particular constituent.

OCSD is concerned with the language under Action 1.3.1. that encourages or requires local jurisdictions to implement Low Impact Development (LID) and Green development standards for construction projects. OCSD believes that LID/Green infrastructure may not be practical for certain types of construction projects and may add unnecessary costs and delays to critical capital improvement projects that are needed to address water quality issues (i.e., rehabilitating substandard wastewater treatment facilities).

### *Program Priority 2: Protect Groundwater*

OCSD is concerned that this Program Priority fails to recognize that not all groundwater is used, or is suitable for municipal and domestic use. We encourage the SWRCB to include an objective that looks to prioritize groundwater basins that are in fact used for municipal and domestic supply and focus regulatory efforts on those basins.

### Priority 3: Promote Sustainable Water Supplies

Under the *Issue Summary* section, OCSD recommends adding a statement on providing general information and educational material on water supply shortages, water conservation and water quality issues to the general public and proactively reaching out to the general public about basic water conservation practices that can be implemented by individual residents and businesses.

Under Action 3.2.1 the SWRCB states it would “*Require the development of Water Recycling Plans, through the permit/WDR renewal cycle, for wastewater treatment plants located in areas using imported water supplies.*” OCSD is concerned that this mandate-based approach to recycling may not be appropriate or realistically achievable for many POTWs. POTWs may resist recycling because the diversion of highly treated water for recycling purposes changes the quality of the remaining effluent, increasing the concentration of pollutants because there is less water for dilution. A better approach would be to provide incentives for water recycling, and including regulatory relief on the limits of certain constituents that are more concentrated in the discharged effluent as a result of diverting some flow for recycling.

### **PLANNING PRIORITIES**

OCSD supports the SWRCB establishing the Basin Planning process as one of its planning priorities within the updated Strategic Plan. Since Basin Plans are the key basis for regulatory actions and guide stakeholders with watershed management strategies at the regional level, it is a practical approach for implementing programs and establishing policies to address unique local water quality-related issues and conditions.

Outdated Basin Plans information should be brought up-to-date using accepted scientific research and information. Water quality objectives should take into account the natural condition of a water body including naturally occurring pollutants and any legacy pollutants.

OCSD agrees with the SWRCB’s statement that “*water supply and use are inherently linked to water quality.*” OCSD also believes it is prudent to coordinate Basin Plans with the Department of Water Resources (DWR) Water Plan, when applicable, to reduce redundancy or conflicts in regulations and to ensure that strategies and objectives from both the RWQCB and the DWR related to water quality are linked and conveyed accurately in both of their individual plans.

Priority 4. California Water Quality Plan

Under Objective 4.1, the SWRCB will create a new planning document, the California Water Quality Plan, which would not only encompass the Basin Plan triennial review process but the California Water Quality Plan would itself be incorporated into the DWR Water Plan. OCSD understands the rationale for this decision, but is concerned that the effort needed to implement the California Water Quality Plan will take resources away from other high priority programs and projects SWRCB and Regional Board staff are responsible for overseeing or implementing. OCSD also questions whether the SWRCB has already gained support from both the RWQCBs and DWR to proceed with this approach.

Priority 5. Basin Planning

OCSD generally supports Goal 5 under the *Basin Planning – Goal, Objectives and Actions* section that states, “*Basin Plans are consistently organized by 2012, and updated by 2015, to provide a clear structure that readily conveys the beneficial uses, water quality objectives, goals for watersheds, plans for achieving those goals, and monitoring to inform and adjust the plans.*”

Consistency is important for both the SWRCB and Regional Boards in administering programs, and for the regulated community who must comply with the Basin Plans, especially for those entities that are located between two regional board jurisdictions. However, certain local socioeconomic circumstances coupled with land use patterns and watershed conditions may require unique regulatory and management approaches for addressing water quality-related problems at the regional level. Therefore, OCSD believes there should be a consistent process for updating Basin Plans, including consistent use of format, terminology, and accessibility. These goals should be met within a reasonable time frame. However, OCSD would also recommend maintaining flexibility in Basin Plan policy to allow for addressing unique regional issues and objectives in distinct ways that are most appropriate for the benefit of local water quality conditions.

OCSD strongly recommends that the SWRCB retain the language from the November 30, 2007 draft of the Strategic Plan Update under the *Why this issue is so critical to the Water Boards and to our stakeholders* section of *Priority 1: Basin Planning* which stated that inadequate Basin Plans result in...“*inconsistent and inequitable application of regulatory approaches.*” Possible inconsistencies between Basin Plans are extremely problematic for entities that are regulated by two regional boards, particularly when those regional boards have significant differences in their regulatory approaches. OCSD recommends adding a mechanism to the Basin Plan, as part of its streamlining process, to address this type of jurisdictional issue to ensure that entities, which are covered by two or more regional boards, avoid being inconsistently regulated.



### **Organizational Performance Priorities**

OCSD generally agrees with the SWRCB's *Goals, Objectives* and *Actions* established for the *Organizational Performance Priorities*.

OCSD supports the SWRCB using partnerships and collaborative efforts to address water quality problems. OCSD also encourages the SWRCB and Regional Boards to add a statement about utilizing their websites for providing educational material to the public on a myriad of water-related issues including water conservation practices, training materials, and templates for innovative water quality control programs. OCSD believes the SWRCB should include outreach activities in the Strategic Plan. Outreach efforts can be a beneficial mechanism for getting the public to help address water quality problems.

In closing, thank you for your consideration of our comments on the SWRCB's Strategic Plan Update. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (714) 593-7450. The staff person working on this issue is Karen Baroldi, and she may be reached at (714) 593-7461.



Michael D. Moore  
Environmental Compliance and Regulatory Affairs Manager

MDM:wh

H:\dept\ts\620\GENERAL DATA\WATER GROUP\Letters\D1\_KB\_OCSD\_Strategic\_Plan CommentLetter\_02-15-08.doc