

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding Water Quality Issues in the Los Osos Community

Spring 2002 (Edition 3 of 4)

Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board



Why does the Project cost so much?

Current estimates indicate the wastewater management project (plus associated environmental mitigation) will cost approximately \$85 million. By any measure, this is a large expense. The community has grown without a corresponding investment in infrastructure (roads, flood control/drainage, and wastewater). Through the 1980s the Federal government was subsidizing the costs for many wastewater treatment facilities nationwide. Unfortunately those grants are no longer available. What have replaced those grants are low interest loans. Regional Board staff worked hard back in the late 70s and 80s to get grant funding for a Los Osos community wastewater project. In continuing that trend we endorsed the January 2002 State Water Resources Control Board approval of the Los Osos Community Services District's (CSD) request for a \$65 million low interest State Revolving Fund loan. This loan will fund the majority of the wastewater project.

We understand that to further reduce the financial burden to the Los Osos community, the Los Osos CSD has been pursuing every potential source of financial assistance, including federal appropriations. Last year these efforts were successful in obtaining \$1 million from the state budget for planning costs, a \$51,000 grant from the Coastal Resources program for habitat conservation plan development, and a \$2 million Proposition 13 grant from the State Water Resources Control Board for disposal and environmental mitigation property acquisition. It is Regional Board's staff intent to continue to assist the CSD with information on additional funding sources in order to reduce the cost to the community.

Unfortunately each delay in the project (of which there have been a great number) has resulted in significant cost increases. Further

delays due to litigation and more studies will only result in a more costly project and more expense to the citizens of Los Osos.

Why not just deal with the problem by treating our ground water?

Removal of nitrate from a water supply is not easy, and it is expensive. Furthermore, by allowing the pollution and then treating the result, we (as society) would not be taking responsibility for the waste we are producing. That responsibility is shifted to whomever wanted to use clean water. The basic premise of all environmental regulations is that the waste producer must take responsibility for treating their wastewater.

One of the primary goals of the proposed wastewater project is to restore and protect the ground water as a source of domestic supply for current and future generations. Future generations should not bear the burden of cleaning (treating) the water supply due to irresponsible waste disposal practices of today.

Why can't Los Osos have a wastewater alternative similar to the San Lorenzo Valley or Templeton?

Each community manages wastewater according to its own unique community-specific circumstances (hydrology, geology, development density, resource needs, etc.).

Templeton contracts with the City of Paso Robles and pumps a portion of its wastewater to the Paso Robles treatment facility. The remainder of Templeton is served by a combination of septic systems (on large lots) and a pond system.

The San Lorenzo Valley area is a hilly/steeplly sloped and wooded area of Santa Cruz County. It includes a combination of community sewers and on-site systems. Surface water vs. ground

water impacts due to septic systems were the primary culprit in this case. One of the unique features of the San Lorenzo Valley is that the County has developed a long-term management plan for addressing failing septic systems and water quality impacts. The management plan calls for sewerage in some areas (where development density makes such action feasible), upgrades for some on-site systems (ranging from septic tank retrofits/inserts to mini-treatment plants), and a variety of management, inspection and sampling strategies to assure effectiveness. The plan for Los Osos is similar; it calls for sewerage in small lot areas, with septic system management in the larger lot areas.

Templeton and San Lorenzo Valley exemplify the diverse strategies, which are used to manage wastewater, there are many others. The point is many years of effort and considerable financial resources have been spent developing a project suitable for Los Osos--A project designed specifically for the unique geological and geographical conditions and needs of Los Osos.

The most recent evaluation of Los Osos' unique conditions and needs, and detailed alternative analysis and feasibility study were completed as part of the Los Osos wastewater project Environmental Impact Report process.

What is the Prohibition Zone and what does it mean to Los Osos Property Owners?

In 1983, the Regional Board adopted Resolution No. 83-13, which amended the Water Quality Control Plan, Central Coast Basin (Basin Plan) and prohibited discharges of waste from individual and community sewage systems within portions of the Baywood Park/Los Osos area of San Luis Obispo County (Basin Plan prohibition area). The prohibition means that the existing septic systems are discharging illegally (and have been for 14 years) and that no new discharges (e.g., from potential homes on vacant lots) are allowed. It also means that if the community fails to resolve the problem, further enforcement may

be pursued by the Regional Board to assure water quality protection.

At the time the Regional Board adopted Resolution No. 83-13, the County represented that it could design and complete a wastewater collection and treatment system that would eliminate the need for individual and community on-site sewage systems by November 1, 1988. That project failed and the Regional Board prohibited any new discharges (effectively a building moratorium). This prohibition zone will remain in place until a viable solution and wastewater project is implemented; a solution which protects and restores the quality of Los Osos ground water basin and Morro Bay Estuary.

Summary

Our hope and intent with this series of flyers is to provide some basic facts and scientific information to address questions that have repeatedly come up regarding this subject. We believe the community, through its locally elected Los Osos Community Services District, has been working hard to develop a technically sound and viable wastewater project. This project was developed after lengthy and comprehensive evaluation of wastewater technologies and alternatives. Cost of the project is a concern for everyone, and delays will contribute to even greater expense.

For More Information

If you have questions, please contact:

Sorrel Marks, Project Manager at 549-3695 or Gerhardt Hubner, Coastal Watershed Supervisor at 542-4647



About the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board: Located in San Luis Obispo, we're part of the California Environmental Protection Agency (Cal/EPA). Our mission is to preserve, enhance, and restore the quality of the Central Coast Region's water resources for the benefit of present and future generations. You can contact us by telephone at (805)-549-3147. **Visit us on the web at:** www.swrcb.ca.gov/rwqcb3/WMI/Index.htm