



Enforcement News

City of Oceanside to pay \$1.5 million penalty for two sanitary sewer overflows during major storm

Incidents took place at lift station, sewage treatment plant

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SACRAMENTO – The City of Oceanside agreed to pay \$1.5 million to the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board for high volume sanitary sewer overflows that occurred during heavy rains at a lift station and wastewater treatment plant, both operated by the city, threatening the health of humans, fish and wildlife.

The overflow at the Buena Vista Lift Station, a collection structure that pumps wastewater to the San Luis Rey Water Reclamation Facility, discharged over 900,000 gallons of untreated sewage to Buena Vista Creek and Buena Vista Lagoon. The other spill occurred at the San Luis Rey Water Reclamation Facility, where approximately 820,000 gallons of sewage were released into the Windmill and Pilgrim creeks and eventually flowed into the San Luis Rey River. Both incidents took place in April 2020.

“Sewage spills are one of the most significant impacts to local water and public health,” executive officer David Gibson said Wednesday after the San Diego Water Board approved the settlement. “We can’t assume that the rainfall pattern of the last 50 years will be the same over the next 50 years. Today’s action by the board reinforces the need for local agencies to plan and harden sewage systems to manage these flows and prevent failures that may result from these atmospheric river storm events.”

In lieu of a contested hearing, the city engaged in settlement discussions with board staff and provided a more accurate estimate of the overflow at the lift station. Also, in exchange for a 10% penalty reduction, Oceanside agreed to conduct a feasibility study to determine the best course of action to prevent future overflows during heavy rains.

Untreated sewage contains levels of suspended solids, pathogenic organisms, toxic pollutants, nutrients, oxygen-demanding organic compounds, oil and grease, trash, and other pollutants known to exceed existing water quality standards. These pollutants are a direct threat to humans and can have short-and-long term impacts to fish and shellfish consumption, aquatic-dependent wildlife and its habitat, and contact and non-contact recreation.





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The San Diego region stretches 85 miles of scenic coastline, from Laguna Beach to the Mexican border, and extends 50 miles inland to the crest of the coastal mountain range. The growing population enjoys a mild, semi-arid climate and numerous water-related activities. However, about 90% of the region's water supply is imported from Northern California and the Colorado River.