



# Enforcement News

## **City of San Diego to pay record penalty for massive sewer collection system overflow**

***January 2023 spill sent untreated wastewater into much of the region***

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**SAN DIEGO** – The City of San Diego will pay a \$11.4 million penalty for a Jan. 16, 2023, failure at its pump station caused by a combination of inadequate maintenance, an equipment breakdown and high storm flows that resulted in a spill of an estimated 9.8 million gallons of untreated wastewater at multiple locations.

The fine – which is the largest amount ever assessed by the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board - was approved by the board at its regular meeting Wednesday.

“Sewage spills continue to be one of the largest human and environmental health threats in our region,” said San Diego Water Board Chair Gary Strawn. “Our actions today, and the amount of the penalty, reflect the magnitude of the overflow and the importance of hardening our sanitary sewer collection systems against storm events, which are becoming more extreme and problematic.”

When the pump station on Harbor Drive operates efficiently, the sewage is collected and moved uphill to the 40-acre Point Loma Wastewater Treatment Plant, a primary treatment structure with one of the longest and deepest ocean outfalls in the United States.

The January malfunction at the pump station occurred following three days of heavy rain and while two of the collection facility’s eight pumps were out of service for maintenance. The untreated sewage that was released from the plant and moved throughout San Diego typically contains fecal waste, bacteria and pathogens, fats, oils, and grease, nutrients, organic compounds and other pollutants that exceed water quality standards and can harm public health and the environment.

The spill flowed through the downtown corridor, the San Diego Bay shoreline and into the San Diego River. The city conducted sampling at 14 impacted locations on the shoreline and subsequently performed an environmental assessment. In response to the findings, which revealed high levels of bacteria on a shoreline known for its habitats,



fishing and recreational uses, the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health and the San Diego City Public Utilities Department posted closure notices at seven locations. The city's assessment, however, found little evidence of harmful impacts to wildlife.

"This enforcement action demonstrates our commitment to protecting and improving water quality in our community," said Dave Gibson, executive officer for the regional board. "We are working to the fullest extent within our authorities to reduce threats to water quality, whether those threats take the form of daily sewage flows across the border or inadequate maintenance at pump stations, as in this case. Large storm events are now a foreseeable circumstance that wastewater systems must plan for."

The fine will be paid to the State Water Resources Control Board's [Cleanup and Abatement Account](#), which provides funding for emergency responses statewide to clean up or mitigate toxic spills or pollution.

*The San Diego region stretches along 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. Due to its mild climate, residents and tourists alike enjoy numerous water-related activities. However, because the area receives minimal precipitation, about 90% of the region's water supply is imported from Northern California and the Colorado River.*