

District sues to maintain current water treatment

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The fight over effluent pumped into the Santa Barbara Channel has hit the courts.

The Goleta Sanitary District on Thursday announced a Superior Court lawsuit against two state agencies, an effort to fight recent decisions that could increase the how much treatment wastewater gets before it hits the ocean.

"We're hoping to get a rehearing or a negotiated settlement of some sort," said John Fox, president of the district's board of directors. "It could go in a number of different ways."

Added Kamil Azoury, the district general manager: "We have a timeline that is a statute of limitations. If you don't file the action, then you lose the option to do that. That is part of the reason the action is being filed."

The district plant on William Moffett Place is the only treatment facility in the county that does not use a second round of processing to remove solids from its sewage.

Instead, the district provides secondary treatment for about 60 percent of its wastewater, which removes up to 90 percent of organic solids. That water is then blended with the wastewater that receives only primary treatment. The mix is released into the ocean.

District officials say secondary treatment would cost tens of millions of dollars and force monthly bills to increase for 85,000 Goleta Valley residents.

Citing a record of discharges much cleaner than state and federal standards require, the district in 2001 requested permission for a fourth five-year postponement of more rigorous treatment.

Seventeen months ago, the Regional Water Quality Control Board denied the request. Last month, the state Water Resources Control Board effectively upheld the decision.

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