



## CITY OF OAKLAND

250 FRANK H. OGAWA PLAZA OAKLAND, CALIFORNIA 94612-2033

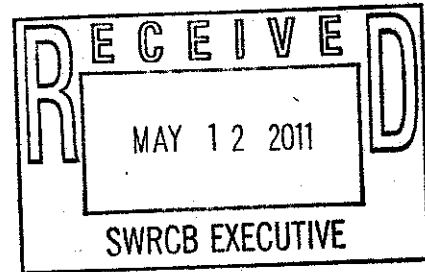
Public Works Agency  
Vitaly B. Troyan, P.E.  
Agency Director

(510) 238-3961  
FAX (510) 238-6428  
TDD (510) 238-7644

May 12, 2011

Via email: [commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov)

Jeanine Townsend  
Clerk to the Board  
State Water Resources Control Board  
1001 I Street, Sacramento, CA 95814



Subject: Comment Letter – SSS WDRs Review & Update

Dear Ms. Townsend:

The City of Oakland appreciates the opportunity to comment on the State Water Quality Control Board's proposed revisions to the Sanitary Sewer System Waste Discharge Requirements (SSS WDRs). We own and maintain approximately 1,000 miles of mains in our sanitary sewer collection system serving a population of about 400,000 people.

The proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs include several un-funded mandates and represent a major departure from the program that is still being implemented under the existing WDRs. While we appreciate the State Water Board's efforts to address certain issues associated with the existing WDRs, we are very concerned about a number of the proposed revisions, especially those related to reporting of private lateral sewage discharges (PLSDs), and the onerous additions to sewer system management plan (SSMP) requirements that should not be mandated unless State Water Board guidance and funding are first made available. We also oppose strongly any kind of NPDES permitting as it might relate to collection system operations and maintenance. We will specifically address these issues later in this letter. As requirements become more complicated and confusing, more staff time is directed towards preparing reports and re-organizing information and operating procedures, and less time is spent actually managing or conducting the appropriate operations and maintenance (O&M) activities to prevent SSOs and properly maintain our collection system.

The following are our specific comments regarding the proposed draft revisions to the SSS WDR circulated by the Water Board staff on March 24, 2011. Please note that the City of Oakland will provide additional comments jointly in coordination with the East Bay Collection Systems Advisory Committee (EBCSAC).

**1. Sanitary sewer system regulations should not be adopted under a two-tiered WDRs and NPDES permit.**

We are strongly opposed to the two-tiered WDRs and NPDES permit alternative, whereby an SSO occurring previously or in the future would trigger the requirement to apply for an NPDES permit, and agree with several points included in the Staff Report also opposing this concept. Since the existing SSS WDRs and the proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs do not authorize sanitary-sewer overflows (SSOs) to waters of the United States, there is no need for an NPDES permit. The result of triggering an NPDES permit would subject local public agencies to additional and more egregious non-governmental organization (NGO) lawsuits and higher administrative penalties with absolutely no demonstration that this would improve water quality or further reduce SSOs. In addition, the time necessary to apply for and receive a new NPDES Permit will leave our collection system in regulatory limbo while that permit is being negotiated.

As described in the Staff Report, this alternative would require significant additional Water Board and local Regional Board staff resources to negotiate, track and implement the different permit tiers. We understand that these staff resources are limited, and believe that they should instead be used to further improve SSO participation and reduction efforts under the existing WDRs.

**2. The basis for mandatory reporting of Private Lateral Sewage Discharges (PLSDs) is not justified, and creates an inappropriate burden for public agency staff.**

The SSS WDR would require enrollees to report spills from privately owned laterals when they become aware of them. Such reporting is currently voluntary. Water Board staff has not provided adequate justification nor has it thoroughly considered the staffing and financial resources necessary to require public agencies to report PLSDs that are not affiliated with the collection system agency. The justification offered for this change is simply that the State Water Board wants to “get a better picture of” the magnitude of PSLDs and better identify collection systems with “systemic issues” with PSLDs.

The Staff Report includes a reference to a study that indicated that the total volume of sewage from private laterals is about 5% of the total volume from SSOs, almost all of which never pose a threat to waters of the State. Requiring public agencies to provide detailed information regarding such a small percentage of overflow volumes from parts of the system over which they have no control is not appropriate and would divert limited staff resources from higher priority issues that actually protect waters. In many cases it is very difficult to determine the owner of the private lateral sewage discharge and therefore staff resources may need to spend time attempting to identify the legal owner or to actually determine what property is involved in the overflow as many of these occurrences do not evidence themselves in the public right of way.

As to the goal of generating better information regarding PSL spills, we do not believe that the burden of requiring enrollees to report information or face being in noncompliance with the SSS WDR bears a reasonable relationship to the need for the information and the benefits to be

obtained. Enrollees reporting spills may be liable to the property owner for errors in reporting, and property owners may claim they are entitled to compensation from the local agency for repair or replacement costs stemming from the reported spill. Under the current voluntary reporting scheme, the enrollee can weigh these factors in deciding whether to report PSL spills.

Furthermore, if enrollees are required to report spills whether or not they occur within the enrollee's system, multiple entities (city, county, POTW, etc.) could all be required to report a single PLSD spill with potentially differing estimates of volume and other basic information. Rather than enhance the Board's knowledge base, this will actually lead to greater confusion and require additional resources to sort out the multiple PLSD reports.

We recommend that the State Water Board first work with the California Department of Public Health and local environmental health officers to determine if the desired information can be obtained through mutual agency cooperation. We believe that public health agencies have the best knowledge of overflows from private property laterals, and are, in most instances, the most appropriate agencies to respond to these events.

**3. It is essential that State and Regional Water Board staff consider the reasons for each SSO in any enforcement action.**

The existing SSS WDRs included language in Provision D.6 that provided some reassurance that, in the case of an SSO enforcement action, the State and/or Regional Water Board would consider why the SSO might have occurred and to what extent it would have been reasonably possible for the Enrollee to prevent it.

Existing language read: "*In assessing these factors, the State and/or Regional Water Boards will also consider whether...*" (Emphasis added)

In the proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs, this language was changed to read: "*In assessing these factors, the State and/or Regional Water Boards may also consider whether...*" (Emphasis added)

The proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs would transform the existing enforcement discretion language, which expresses a clear statement of the State Board's intent regarding enforcement priorities and responses, into a purely advisory provision, which individual regional boards are free to follow or ignore as they choose. The factors described in (a) through (g) of Provision D.6 are highly relevant to the Enrollee's efforts to properly manage, operate and maintain its system and these factors should definitely be considered in enforcement actions.

It is imperative that the existing language be retained.

**4. Significant additional Sewer System Management Plan (SSMP) requirements are unfunded mandates, and should not be mandated until the State Water Board provides guidance and funding.**

The proposed “Risk and Threat Analysis” and “Staff Performance Assessment Program” are vague, not statistically supported, unnecessarily complicated, and overly prescriptive.

The proposed Risk and Threat Analysis of all sanitary sewer assets would be complex and resource-intensive, and would not provide incrementally more benefit than that provided by an otherwise well-operated and managed system. It is not appropriate to require every agency to implement this requirement unless the Water Board can demonstrate that those agencies complying with current requirements have been ineffective in reducing SSOs. This program should also only be required if and when adequate Water Board guidance has been developed and funding provided.

Requiring development and implementation of the proposed Staff Assessment Program on an agency-by-agency basis is unrealistic. The expectations outlined in the proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs suggest that agency staff would be responsible for developing a program similar to the existing Technical Certification Program offered by the California Water Environment Association, which would require a substantial investment of resources to do redundant work at each agency. Additionally, most all of this information is available and in agency budgets that are publicly approved by the local elected officials. Finally, it is not appropriate to require public agencies to train contractors (which are separate, private entities). In addition there is no mechanism readily available throughout a project to determine when and how additional training is required when the contractors staffing changes as much as daily or weekly.

The Water Board should not implement these new requirements until detailed program guidance is provided and the reality of how contractors prosecute their work is understood by the Water Board.

**5. SSMP sections (i) and (j) should be combined, because otherwise the requirements for routine review and revisions of the SSMP are redundant and contradictory.**

SSMP Section (i) *Performance Targets and Program Modifications* and Section (j) *SSMP Program Audits* both require the Enrollee to evaluate the effectiveness of the SSMP and correct or update the document as necessary. Section (i) indicates that this process is to occur on an annual basis, while Section (j) specifies a minimum frequency of once every two years. We recommend that Water Board staff combine these two sections and clarify the requirements.

**6. Revisions to SSMP requirements are premature and need to be coordinated with EPA.**

We are concerned that the proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs include *significant* changes to SSMP program requirements. We strongly urge that the existing SSMP requirements be preserved as in the existing SSS WDRs. As the Staff Report indicates, development and implementation of SSMPs by SSS WDRs enrollees has just been completed and these plans need to have time to be fully implemented so their effectiveness can be properly assessed. Further, it is recognized that dramatically changing SSMP requirements before full implementation will

likely lead to confusion regarding the SSMP requirements among enrollees, the public, and Water Board staff.

In addition, the US EPA requires many municipalities to develop Asset Management Implementation Plans (AMIPs), which overlap SSMPs. We are requesting that the regional boards, state and EPA meet, coordinate and develop one planning document instead of requiring multiple overlapping and occasionally contradictory documents.

**7. The findings include several incorrect statements about PLSDs (Findings 7 & 9).**

Finding 7 in the proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs includes the statement: "SSOs and PLSDs may pollute surface or ground waters, threaten beneficial uses and public health ..." We disagree that PLSDs are in the same category as SSOs from mainline sewers in terms of water quality impacts. These overflows are very small in volume individually, and overall. The words "...and PLSDs..." should be removed.

Finding 9 in the proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs includes the statement: "Major causes of SSOs and PLSDs include but are not limited to: grease blockages, root blockages, debris blockages, sewer line flood damage, manhole structure failures, pipe failures, vandalism, pump station mechanical failures, power outages, excessive storm or ground water inflow/infiltration, sanitary sewer age, construction and related material failures, lack of proper operation and maintenance, insufficient capacity, and contractor-caused damages. Many SSOs and PLSDs can be prevented by having adequate facilities, source control measures, and proper operation and maintenance of the sanitary sewer system." Including PLSDs in these descriptions is incorrect: many of the items on the first list are not causes of PLSDs, and many PLSDs cannot be prevented as described in the second sentence. References to PLSDs should be removed.

**8. Requiring de-chlorination of clean-up water is counter-productive.**

Prohibition C.3 indicates that potable water would have to be de-chlorinated before it could be used for spill clean-up (in the event water used for clean-up is not fully recovered). Putting restrictions on the use of potable water in cleaning up an SSO that is otherwise likely to violate either of the first two prohibitions simply adds further unnecessary challenges and is not enforceable without field monitoring equipment and additional recordkeeping by the agency. For practical matters all chlorine residuals will be stripped from water from a hydrant during the filling and spraying efforts leaving little or no residual to be a contaminant. In addition, the amount of potable water used, combined with the distance it would have to travel to reach a surface water (so the chlorine would readily degrade) does not warrant the additional on-site operational difficulty and recordkeeping to comply with this requirement. Finally there is no scientific evidence that the use of chlorinated water for wash down is or has caused any degradation to water quality from its use to date.

**9. It is inappropriate to use incomplete information about PLSDs to characterize sanitary sewer system condition and management (Provision 4).**

We do not believe that meaningful statistics can be derived from data collected only for those PLSDs that an agency becomes aware of, and we do not support the idea that Water Board staff would decide that collection systems have “systemic issues” based on these incomplete data sets.

The requirement for Enrollees to report PLSDs they become aware of should be removed from Provision 4.

**10. Provision 8 includes an incorrect assumption regarding sanitary sewer system replacement.**

Provision 8 suggests that sanitary sewer systems will need replacing within the timeframe of these WDRs. The reference to “eventual replacement” should be removed because the need to replace sewers is dependent on several factors. These factors could include some or all of the following; pipe condition, location, risk of failure, consequences of failure, future capital work in the area, and pipes with extraordinarily high maintenance costs. Sewers should not be replaced automatically when they reach a certain age, especially when they are in good condition and functioning as designed. This would not be good public policy or a wise use of limited public resources. For example, the useful life of certain types of high strength plastic pipe has yet to be determined.

**11. Definitions related to private laterals are confusing and contradictory.**

The following definitions are confusing and contradictory, as explained in the following paragraphs.

- *Lateral – Segment(s) of pipe that connect(s) a home, building, or satellite sewer system to a sewer main.*

The definition of a lateral should not include any reference to satellite sewer systems, as the management and performance of each are very different. Satellite systems should have a separate and distinct definition.

- *Private Lateral – Privately owned sewer piping that is tributary to an Enrollee's sanitary sewer system. The responsibility for maintaining private laterals can be solely that of the Enrollee or private property owner; or it can be shared between the two parties. Sewer use agreements dictate lateral responsibility and the basis for the shared agreement. (emphasis added)*

This definition does not make reference to upper laterals and lower laterals and is therefore confusing. Also, it is misleading to state that sewer use agreements dictate lateral responsibility, as these agreements seldom exist with property owners.

- *Private Lateral Sewage Discharge (PLSD) – Wastewater discharges caused by blockages or other problems within laterals are the responsibility of the private lateral owner and not the Enrollee. Discharges from sanitary sewer systems which are tributary to the Enrollee's sanitary sewer system but are not owned by the Enrollee and do not meet the applicability requirements for enrollment under the SSS WDRs are also considered PLSDs. (emphasis added)*

This definition indicates that PLSDs include overflows from any portion of the lateral, regardless of whether or not the lower laterals are privately owned. The definition of a "private lateral sewage discharge" is inconsistent with that describing a "private lateral", as one includes publicly-owned lower laterals while the other does not.

**12. Language describing SSMP requirements should be revised as follows (SSMP sections are listed in the order they appear in the proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs):**

- *Organization* - Including names, email addresses, and telephone numbers for the staff described in paragraph (b) (ii) is excessive information and inappropriate in a public document. Only the position and phone number should be required.
- *Legal Authority* – Paragraph (c) (v) should be revised to read: "Restrict, condition or prohibit new connections under certain conditions." In addition, Paragraph (c) (vi) indicates that agencies must have legal authority to "limit the discharge of roots..." It is not clear if this phrase is intended to refer to limiting root intrusion (which would be covered by good standard specifications), or to limiting the illicit discharge of debris including cut roots (which is already included in paragraph (c) (i)). In any case, the word "roots" should be removed from this paragraph.
- *Operations and Maintenance Program*

- *Map* - Updating sewer system maps to identify and include all backflow prevention devices (back water valves) would be too onerous as they are not owned by the agency; this requirement should be removed.

Also, the last section of paragraph (d) (i) should be revised to read: "A map illustrating the current extent of the sewer system shall be included in the SSMP or in a GIS." Also, this requirement needs to be clarified. It is not clear if "the current extent of the sewer system" refers to a one page map of the service area, or the entire detailed map. The latter would be impractical to include in the SSMP.

- *Rehabilitation and Replacement* - The third sentence in paragraph (d) (iii) should be revised to read: "Rehabilitation and replacement shall focus on sewer pipes that are at risk of collapse or prone to more frequent blockages due to pipe

defects.” It is not correct to imply that age alone is problematic. We know that it does not, nor is it correct to imply ‘aging’ is the same as ‘deteriorating’.

- *O&M and Sewer System Replacement Funding* – The first sentence in section (d) (vi) should be revised to read “The SSMP shall include budgets for routine sewer system operation and maintenance and for the capital improvement plan including proposed replacement of sewer system assets over time as determined by careful evaluation of condition of the system.”
- *Design and Performance Provisions* – The addition of the phrase “all aspects of” in both paragraphs (i) and (ii) should be removed; requiring each agency to update their standards and specifications to cover every last possible minor detail of sanitary sewer system construction and inspections just to meet this requirement would create an unwarranted burden on staff. Also, the phrase is not necessary and is already implied.
- *FOG Control Program* – Proposed revisions to (g) (iii) would simultaneously require legal authority to prohibit FOG discharges to the system and to require FOG dischargers to implement measures to prevent SSOs and blockages caused by FOG. This revised language contradicts itself, first by indicating that FOG discharges are to be prohibited, and then by including requirements for FOG dischargers. Also, the language appears to apply to both residential and commercial sources of FOG, but fails to recognize that logistical challenges may outweigh the benefits of *requiring* best management practices for residential FOG sources. We request that this existing language be preserved: “This plan shall include the following as appropriate...The legal authority to prohibit discharges to the system and identify measures to prevent SSOs and blockages caused by FOG.”

### 13. Notification requirements need to be clarified.

We support the Staff Report’s indication that only Cal EMA would need to be notified when spills to surface water of any volume occur. However, Paragraph G.4 indicates that Enrollees are to provide immediate notification of SSOs to the local health officer or the local director of environmental health, contrary to the instructions indicated in Section A of the Monitoring and Reporting Program and the Staff Report. Please clarify that notification shall only to be made to Cal EMA, and indicate that Cal EMA will notify other agencies.

Further, reporting of Category 1 and Category 2 SSOs to EMA will result in all agencies sending thousands of SSO reports to EMA and many may include ‘false alarms’. We recommend EMA reporting only for Category 1 SSOs as category 2 SSO is not considered to be an emergency. We also recommend creating a single call-in phone number for agencies to report SSOs.



**14. Providing whole SSMPs in an electronic form is not always practical.**

Not every agency has their SSMP in one electronic document, and, in many cases, the SSMP makes reference to other documents which may only exist in hard copy form. These issues would make it difficult or impossible for some agencies to provide the whole SSMP in an electronic format. In addition most agencies currently make these documents available on their websites so just identifying the website address seems completely adequate for availability to the public and/or the regulatory community.

**15. Certain Monitoring and Reporting Program requirements need to be clarified.**

We believe several minor revisions should be made to clarify Monitoring and Reporting Program requirements:

- The second paragraph referring to other notification and reporting requirements is unnecessarily confusing and should be removed.
- Item 1.H under the description of mandatory information to be included in Category 2 SSO reports should be revised to read: “SSS failure point (main, lateral, etc.), if applicable.”
- Item 3.I under the description of mandatory information to be included in Category 1 SSO reports should be revised to read: “Name of surface waters impacted (if applicable and if known)...”
- Item 1.D under the minimum records to be maintained by the Enrollee should be revised to read: “...and the complainant’s name and telephone number, if known.”

**16. Enrollee Coverage Reenrollment (Application Requirement 1)**

The draft SSS WDR requires all current enrollees to reenroll under this new SSS WDR within six (6) months of adoption. This requirement is a waste of staff resources and does not provide the Water Board with any new information that is not already detailed in the enrollees’ collection system information with the State. We do not understand the need for this requirement nor the added information that is expected by reenrolling. This will be a waste of both local and State staff time, will lead to confusion when and if an agency does not reenroll due to now being excluded from the requirements and will be a significant irritation to 1100 agencies throughout the State. We suggest that the Water Board consider only requiring agencies that no longer will be covered by this regulation submit a form or letter stating that they are no longer covered and will no longer be complying with the requirements. We understand that this will only affect approximately 80 agencies throughout the state and is in their best interest to respond and remove their agencies from the regulations. Why must the other 1000 agencies be required to again state their enrollment can’t the State recognize those that just continue their compliance with the revised regulations. In addition, all of the information that will be required at the time of reenrollment is the same information that will be required in the new Collection System

Questionnaire that the agencies must complete annually. We recommend that this requirement be deleted except for those agencies requesting removal from the program.

**17. Definition for Sanitary sewer system – Any system of publicly or privately owned pipes, pump stations, sewer lines, or other conveyances, upstream of a wastewater treatment plant head-works used to collect and convey wastewater to a treatment facility or downstream sanitary sewer system. Temporary storage and conveyance facilities attached to the sanitary sewer system (such as vaults, temporary piping, construction trenches, wet wells, impoundments, tanks, etc.)...”**

The original SSO WDR included construction trenches in the definition of a sanitary sewer system. However, the proposed SSS WDR omits construction trenches from the definition of the sanitary sewer system. While it may seem like an insignificant change, this proposal will have serious consequences for all sewer systems in the state. This proposed definition, combined with the lack of diminis spill volume, will cause agencies to have an SSO almost every time a sewer main or lateral was repaired, rehabilitated or replaced.

During construction, plugs, bypass pumping, and restricting water use by homeowners or business (which are actions that are not feasible at many locations) are used to control sewage flows. Even with these measures, there will still be small amounts of sewage entering into the construction trench – an event that the State Board has failed to show causes impacts to water quality. The proposed change to the definition of a sanitary sewer system would cause each of those instances to be an SSO and we would then be required to report and certify every time a drop of sewage entered a construction trench. Compliance with this mandate would be very costly and is another un-funded mandate by the State Water Board.

The State Board should be encouraging enrollees to replace and repair their sewer system as needed but this proposed change would punish enrollees each time they maintained their system. We adamantly oppose the proposed change and request construction trenches to remain in the definition of a sanitary sewer system.

### Conclusions

It is our view that the significant proposed revisions to the SSS WDRs are premature and overly burdensome. Implementation of the existing permit has already successfully resulted in reduced impacts of SSOs on surface water. Additional improvements are expected as capital improvements identified under the current WDR are completed in the future. It is frustrating to invest significant resources in meeting the current requirements only to have them change before our current efforts to comply have been completed. We believe that it would be more productive for the Water Board to focus on bringing all agencies into compliance with the current permit conditions rather than initiating sweeping revisions that regardless of the compliance history or the effectiveness of the current program have not had adequate time to show improved performance and compliance.

The City of Oakland hopes that the State Water Board will take these comments under serious consideration and provide funding for un-funded mandates. We look forward to positive responses to our comments from the Water Board staff and are hopeful that the promised workshops on this topic will reflect many of the suggestions contained herein and will result in a new SSS WDR that is far less prescriptive and resource intensive than the current draft. Thank you again for the opportunity to comment on this important regulation and please be assured of our continued efforts to fully comply with the current and any future regulations at the end of this process.

Thank You,



Vitaly B. Troyan, P.E.  
Agency Director

cc EBCSAC Chair, Doug Humphrey  
EBCSAC Program Manager, Paul Causey  
EBCSAC Administrative Manager, Erin Smith

