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Occidental County Sanitation District

Spring 2017 News, Vol 5, Issue #1

Rates Keep Sanitation Facilities Operating Safely

The Sonoma County Water Agency (Water Agency) operates eight sanitation systems in Sonoma County. Fees from ratepayers are used to collect wastewater from homes and businesses, turn this wastewater into recycled water, and then release this water back into streams or provide it to farms, parks, schools, and others for outdoor irrigation and other beneficial uses. The recycled water produced by the various treatment plants must meet numerous regulatory requirements aimed at protecting public health, water quality, and the environment.

Equipment and facilities used to treat wastewater must operate reliably under harsh conditions and need to be replaced or rebuilt on a regular basis. Fees collected from ratepayers pay for such replacements and rebuilds. Between 1995 and 2014 more than \$140 million in capital expansion and replacement projects were funded among the eight systems.

Annual rate increases have averaged below 6% for the sanitation districts and zones operated by the Water Agency. By comparison, sewer rate increases for municipal wastewater systems in Sonoma County over the past 10 years averaged 8% per year. The goal is to maintain and replace facilities and equipment in order to operate safely, preserve the systems' assets, and protect ratepayers' investments.

Winter Storms Put Pressure on Wastewater Treatment Plants

The series of harsh winter storms this year went a long way to ending the drought, but they also put our local wastewater treatment plants to the test. During heavy rains, water flowing into the plants increases dramatically due to what is known as "inflow and infiltration" caused by aging sewer mains and leaky private sewer laterals. When the wastewater collection systems become overloaded, it can result in sewer overflows, which can harm the environment and could pose a public health threat. Several overflows occurred this year.

The sanitation districts and zones operated by the Water Agency are working to minimize these overflows by upgrading and replacing sewer mains, implementing sewer lateral repair programs, and reaching out to residents about how they can help reduce

inflow to treatment plants during storms. How can you help? One way is to reduce your water usage during the peak of heavy storms. Fewer showers, laundry loads and toilet flushes during those times can help prevent overflows.

How Your Sanitation District Budget Works

The Water Agency strives to operate and maintain these sanitation facilities in an environmentally responsible and fiscally prudent manner. As part of its financial duties, the Water Agency each year publishes proposed changes to sewer service fees in accordance with Proposition 218.

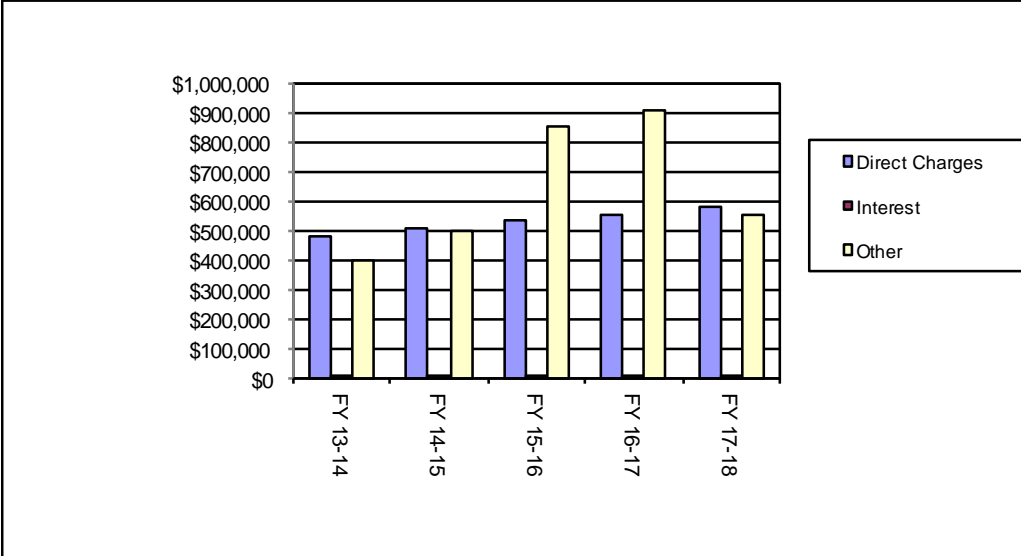
The fiscal year for the districts and zones begins July 1 of each year and runs through June 30 of the following year, so the information in this notice is for the period from July 1, 2017 through June 30, 2018. A five-year capital plan is prepared for the districts based on the need for replacement of aging collection systems and other assets necessary to process the wastewater according to regulatory requirements. Budgets take into account current maintenance and operations costs, any bond or loan repayments, and the necessity to maintain sufficient financial reserves to cover unexpected damage or system failures. Budgets are developed using estimates for these items and for revenues. For some systems, the revenues generated from user fees are not sufficient to keep pace with the rate in which equipment is wearing out. For such systems, fee increases are set incrementally above the rate of inflation to generate a reliable source of funding to replace worn out equipment before it fails.

Budget Approval

After the proposed budgets and rates are developed, the budgets are available for public review at libraries throughout the county and at the Water Agency office located at 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa. Typically, this happens at the end of March. In addition, notices of the proposed rates are mailed to the owners of the properties in the districts and zones at that time. They are also available online. The public can protest rate increases up to the date of the rate hearings, which are typically held in mid-May at the Board of Supervisors chambers. (A protest form and rate hearing information are available at the end of this notice).

Budget Summary Revenue

The primary sources of revenues are the user fees charged to the district ratepayers and collected on property tax bills sent out by the Sonoma County Tax Collectors Office. Additional revenue sources include interest on fund balances and new connection fees. Grants are also a revenue source.

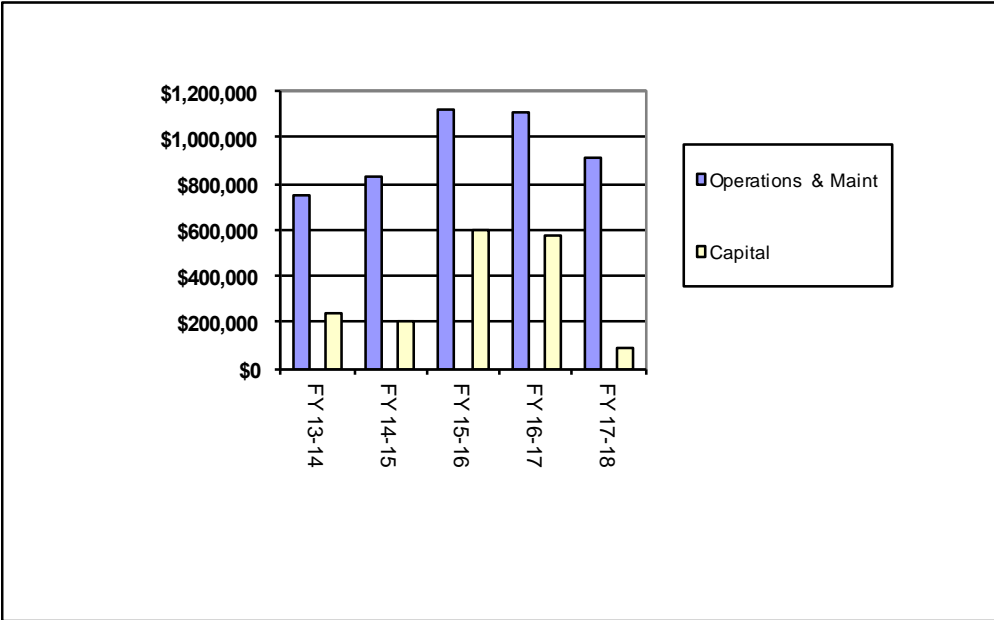


Expenditures

Your district spends money to:

- Operate the wastewater collection and treatment facilities;
- Maintain and repair district facilities;
- Repay bond, other debt and miscellaneous liabilities that may occur as a result of operation; and
- Replace aging infrastructure or make capital investments needed to comply with water quality standards.

Your district also spends money to accomplish the capital projects needed in the district.



Public Invited on Free Treatment Plant Tours

The Water Agency is pleased to host public tours of the Russian River and Sonoma Valley Treatment Plants. To sign up for the tours described below, please fill out the online registration form at www.sonomacountywater.org/tours. Additional details will follow once your registration is received.

Sonoma Valley Wastewater Treatment Plant Tour:

Get an in-depth look at how your wastewater is cleaned and how this water is used during the Sonoma Valley Wastewater Treatment Plant Tour. This tour is offered Saturday, April 22nd, 2017 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Russian River Wastewater Treatment Plant tour:

Get an in-depth look at how your wastewater is cleaned and how it is used during the Russian River Wastewater Treatment Plant Tour (Guerneville). This tour is offered on Saturday, April 29th, 2017 from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Questions?

For more information on the above tours, please contact Sophie Hallam-Eames, Programs Specialist, at (707) 524-6430 or Sophie.HallamEames@scwa.ca.gov.

Water Rebates in Your District

Sanitation District Water Saving Rebate Programs Available

As a sanitation customer, you have some water saving tools at your fingertips! Please take advantage of the following water saving programs which are offered on a first-come, first-served basis while funding lasts:

Clothes Washer: Receive up to \$125 back on the purchase and installation of a new, qualifying high-efficiency clothes washer (HEW). Rebates are available for all Energy Star Most Efficient listed clothes washers except those containing silver ion technology. A \$75 rebate may also be available from PG&E.

Toilet Rebate: Get up to \$150 back on the purchase and installation of each new, qualifying high-efficiency toilet (HET) from the List of Qualifying Models. Download rebate application forms and learn more at www.sonomacountywater.org/rebates or call (707) 547-1918.

High-Efficiency Fixture Direct Install Program: A limited number of high-efficiency fixture retrofits, including toilet, urinal, faucet aerator and showerhead replacements, are offered at no cost to eligible properties. For more information and to register, go to: www.sonomacountywater.org/direct-install.

Grass Removal: If you are a well user within the Russian River watershed, you may now be eligible to save money and conserve water by replacing the grass at your home. Through emergency drought relief funding, the Water Agency is offering homeowners \$0.50 per square foot of grass removed and replaced with low water use plants, up to 500 sq. feet. To view a full list of the program guidelines and qualifications visit www.sonomacountywater.org/drought.

Wastewater Transport Compliance Project Under Review

In December, 2016, the Occidental County Sanitation District released its Wastewater Transport Compliance Project (Project) Initial Study and Negative Declaration. A public hearing was held February 16 in Monte Rio. The comment period for the Project and Initial Study and Negative Declaration (IS/ND) ended February 24, 2017.

The Project would allow Occidental's wastewater to be transported, treated and discharged at treatment plants near Guerneville and Airport Business Park. The wastewater would be transported to the Russian River County Sanitation District (RRCSD) main lift station on Highway 116 near Riverside Drive. Many comments were received that expressed concern regarding transporting the wastewater to the RRCSD. Water Agency staff are considering these comments and will provide an update to District ratepayers. Currently, the District discharges recycled water into Graham's Pond located at the headwaters of Dutch Bill Creek during the summer and to Dutch Bill Creek during the winter. Dutch Bill Creek provides habitat for endangered coho salmon. An order by the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board District requires the District to stop releasing secondary treated water into the pond by 2018.

For more information, go to www.scwa.ca.gov/OCSD.

SoCoAlert Provides Free Emergency Notifications

Sonoma County Fire and Emergency Services now offers a free emergency notification system, SoCoAlert. Sonoma County residents and businesses can now register their contact information and receive potentially life-saving, geographically specific emergency alerts by telephone, mobile phone, text message, email, and social media.

SoCoAlert is used strictly for the purpose of notifying residents of urgent, severe, and certain danger. These may include evacuation notifications, shelter-in-place alerts, boil-water advisories, tsunami warnings, and flood warnings. SoCoAlert will not send non-emergency notifications such as criminal activities, severe traffic, local events, etc. Residents and businesses should NOT assume their information is already in the system.

To register visit www.SoCoAlert.com or call 707-565-1369.

QUIZ

1. What is wastewater?
 - a. Water from a leaking faucet
 - b. Water that comes from toilets, sinks and appliances
 - c. Water from the toilet cistern

2. Which of the following items can you safely flush down the toilet?
 - a. Toilet paper
 - b. Toys
 - c. Wet wipes
 - d. Medication

3. It is okay to dump bacon grease down the drain? YES or NO

4. During a storm event, your treatment plant works even harder to operate. Things you can do to help your system run smoother include all of the following except:
 - a. If possible, flush the toilet less
 - b. Take quick, 5 minute showers
 - c. Water your lawn
 - d. Save laundry day for a sunny day

5. Water rebates are available in my district? TRUE or FALSE

6. Where should you dispose of unused, expired or unwanted medications?
 - a. The toilet
 - b. The trash can
 - c. One of the free 21 drop-off locations throughout the county
 - d. The store where medications were purchased

7. The primary source of revenues for the sanitation systems are the user fees charged to the ratepayer and collected on property tax bills. TRUE or FALSE

8. Your district spends money on which of the following:
 - a. Operate the wastewater collection and treatment facilities
 - b. Replace aging infrastructure
 - c. Make capital investments needed to comply with water quality standards
 - d. Repay bonds and other liabilities that may occur as a result of operation
 - e. All of the above

9. What is recycled water?
 - a. Rainwater captured in barrels
 - b. Water from underground wells
 - c. Wastewater that has been purified at a treatment plant so it can be used again for new purposes

Answers: 1=b, 2=a, 3=no, 4=c, 5=true, 6=c, 7=true, 8=e, 9=c

Proposition 218

Sonoma County Water Agency Occidental County Sanitation District

Notice of Public Hearing Regarding Proposed Sewer Service Fee Increase

Date, Time, and Place of Public Hearing

On May 16, 2017 at 10:00 a.m. or as soon thereafter as the matter may be heard, in the Board Meeting Room, 575 Administration Drive, Room 102A, Santa Rosa, California, the Board of Directors (Board) of the Sonoma County Water Agency (Agency) will conduct a public hearing to consider increasing the annual sewer service fee to be collected on account of sewage collection and treatment services provided by the sewer system of the Occidental County Sanitation District (District) to property within the District.

Property Owner Obligation

The fee will be imposed on each parcel upon which is located one or more structures which are connected to the system and the fee will be collected on the general property tax bill administered by Sonoma County. Payment of the fee will be the responsibility of the owner of the parcel.

What the Fee is for and How the Funds Collected Will be Used

The fee is imposed for two purposes: (a) to finance the ongoing operation and maintenance costs of the system and, (b) to pay the capital replacement program costs of the system. The purpose of the capital replacement program is to provide for the long-term replacement of system facilities as they wear out.

Amount of Proposed Fee Increase and Method of Calculating the Increased Fee

Effective July 1, 2017, the District proposes to increase the fee to \$2,169 per year per "equivalent single-family dwelling" (ESD), an increase of \$101 or 4.9% versus current year. A standard single-family home constitutes one ESD. Parcels which have other uses (for example, apartments and commercial buildings) will be assigned a number of ESDs using standard equivalency factors which estimate the probable quantity and quality of sewage effluent normally generated by such uses in comparison to a single-family home.

The increased fee has been calculated by dividing the annual costs of providing wastewater treatment and collection service by the estimated number of ESDs to arrive at the fee per ESD of \$2,169, and for parcels having more than one ESD assigned, the fee is calculated by multiplying the number of ESDs assigned to the parcel times \$2,169. The draft proposed budget for fiscal year 2017-18 describes the total annual expenses in detail and is available for review at the Occidental County Sanitation District, c/o the Sonoma County Water Agency, 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa, California 95403, and the Sonoma County Regional Libraries in Santa Rosa (Main &

Northwest), Windsor, Healdsburg, Cloverdale, Guerneville, Sebastopol, Petaluma, Rohnert Park, Rincon Valley, Sonoma, and Forestville (El Molino High School).

Further Information Available Prior to the Hearing

At the hearing, the Board will consider adoption of an ordinance which will establish the increased fee. A copy of the ordinance is on file and available for review at the Sonoma County Water Agency, 404 Aviation Boulevard, Santa Rosa, CA 95403. In addition, the following persons may be contacted at the Agency at (707) 526-5370 for further information and/or obtaining copies of the draft proposed budget for fiscal year 2017-18:

Candi Bryon, Accountant III

Lynne Rosselli, Administrative Service Officer II

Property Owner Protest Procedure

This notice has been mailed to you because records of the Sonoma County Assessor list you as an owner of one or more parcels within the District which will be subject to the fee while connected to the system. In the event you have sold property you may have owned within the District, please send this notice to the new owner.

Either prior to or at the public hearing, property owners, or tenants who are directly liable for the payment of the fees, may submit written protests respecting the fee. At the public hearing, the Board will consider all written protests which have been received by the prescribed deadline. In order to be considered, a written protest must be made on the attached form. Only one protest will be counted per parcel. Only protests signed by the current owner(s), or fee-paying tenant(s), will be allowed and must be received no later than the following deadlines:

- If submitted by mail, they must be received (NOT postmarked) no later than 5:00 p.m. on Monday, May 15, 2017, at the mailing address on the form.
- If hand delivered, they must be delivered no later than the close of the public hearing on May 16, 2017, to: Clerk of the Board, Board Meeting Room, as set forth in the opening paragraph

Date of this Notice: March 29, 2017

Rate Protest Form

Note: In order to be considered, any protest must be on this form

Written Protest

I am the parcel owner of the property located at the address on the back of this form, or a tenant that is directly liable for paying the sewer service fee for the property. I am submitting this form to protest the proposed sewer rate increase.

Additional Comments:

Use opposite side or attach additional sheets if needed.

Signature of Property Owner Required

Print Name

www.sonomacountywater.org/OCSD