

# Sewage in San Francisco Bay: Settlement reached to prevent overflows

By **BAY AREA NEWS GROUP**

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ALAMEDA — Six East Bay cities and the East Bay Municipal Utility District have reached an agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that calls for upgrading aging sewer pipes to help prevent sewage overflows and spills reaching San Francisco Bay.

The \$1.5 billion effort will take place over the next 21 years and will include the cities of Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda, Albany, Emeryville and Piedmont, as well as the Stege Sanitary District, which serves Kensington, El Cerrito and parts of Richmond.

The agreement resolves a lawsuit that the EPA, the state Water Resources Control Board and others filed in 2009 and comes as a consent decree lodged Monday in the U.S. District Court, Northern District of California.

The goal is to fix a network of 1,500 miles of aging sewer pipes that can overwhelm treatment plants during heavy rainfall, causing raw or partially treated sewage to overflow into the bay.

Many of the pipes are made of clay and more than 50 years old. In addition, they are cracked from tree roots and earthquakes and can easily clog because of grease and other obstructions.

Over the past 10 years, about 2.4 billion gallons of partially treated sewage has entered the bay, said Jared Blumenfeld, an EPA regional administrator.

“For many years, the health of San Francisco Bay has been imperiled by ongoing pollution, including enormous discharges of raw and partially treated sewage from communities in the East Bay,” Blumenfeld said. “Many of these discharges are the result of aging, deteriorated sewer infrastructure that will be fixed under the EPA

order.”

Along with spreading disease-causing organisms that can threaten public health, the raw and untreated sewage can deplete oxygen in the 1,600-square-mile bay and hurt fish, migratory birds and other wildlife.

“It’s more of ‘death by 1,000 cuts’ in terms of impact to the bay,” said Deb Self, executive director of San Francisco Baykeeper, which was among those that brought the legal action to enforce the Clean Water Act.

Others behind the lawsuit were the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Board and the Our Children’s Earth Foundation.

Under the agreement, EBMUD, the Stege district and the cities will assess and upgrade their sewer system infrastructure, including at EBMUD’s three wet water treatment facilities.

The cities and water districts will also pay a total of \$1.5 million in civic penalties, said Walter Benjamin Fisherow of the Justice Department’s Environment and Natural Resources Division.

The amount each will pay hinges on their record of violations, with Oakland facing the stiffest penalty at \$850,000, Fisherow said.

The legal settlement also continues the requirement that homeowners must inspect and upgrade private sewer lateral lines when selling their property or when carrying out more than \$100,000 in remodeling work.

“It will need to be done before you can convey the house to the new owner,” Blumenfeld said. The work usually costs between \$5,000 and \$7,000, he said.

According to computer modeling, private sewer laterals cause more than 50 percent of all inflow and infiltration that needs to be corrected to prevent wet weather facility discharges reaching the bay.

“We are all connected to the sewer system — residents, businesses, and the city alike,” Oakland Public Works Director Brooke Levin said. “We all share the same goals, which are to protect the bay and our communities and keep them healthy.”

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