



## Press Release

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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### **City of San Diego Approves Sewage Settlement** *Consent Decree Commits City to Sewage System Upgrades*

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After more than six years of negotiations, on Tuesday the San Diego City Council approved a final settlement with San Diego Coastkeeper, The Surfrider Foundation and U.S. EPA that will obligate the City to invest almost \$1 billion in its sewage collection system through 2013. Once officially filed with the Court, the settlement will ensure the continuation of the City's successful Sewer Spill Reduction Program that has resulted in an 83% reduction in spills since 2000.

"When this suit was initiated in 2000, the City was averaging a sewage spill a day and gaining national notoriety for massive spills like the 34 million gallon spill into Adobe Creek and the San Diego River," noted Coastkeeper's Executive Director Bruce Reznik. "We are thrilled to be moving closer to a final settlement that will ensure the City continues its successful efforts to upgrade its sewage system."

Sewage spills, which contain an array of bacteria, viruses and parasites, pose a serious public health threat. While it is difficult to get data on how many people get sick from swimming in sewage contaminated waters, experts say it could be as high as seven million beachgoers every year. The elderly, children, and people with compromised immune systems are the most susceptible to illness. By bringing large quantities of nutrients which feed algal growth and cause dwindling oxygen levels that can cause massive fish kills, sewage spills also pose a significant environmental threat.

The City has entered into two partial consent decrees with the environmental groups and EPA over the past 2 years to begin to correct its chronic sewage spill problem. However, due to the City's fiscal constraints, a long-term settlement was not signed as the City was not able to obligate funds. With the recent increase in wastewater rates, the City is now able to enter into an agreement that will ensure continued investment in sewage infrastructure over the next six years.

The settlement, which will be submitted to the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of California, will require the City to continue its increased pipeline rehabilitation and replacement of 250 miles of pipeline, implement a comprehensive sewer pipeline cleaning program, and to reduce sewer spills caused by cooking oil and grease.

The consent decree settles the original lawsuit over sewer spills filed in 2001 by The Surfrider Foundation and San Diego Coastkeeper. The U.S. EPA joined that suit in 2003.

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Founded in 1995, San Diego Coastkeeper protects the region's bays, beaches, watersheds and ocean for the people and wildlife that depend on them. We group balances community outreach, education, and advocacy to promote stewardship of clean water and a healthy coastal ecosystem.

The Surfrider Foundation is a non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and enjoyment of the world's oceans, waves, and beaches for all people.