



# San Francisco Water Power Sewer

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BY EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL

Mr. Russell Norman  
State Water Resources Control Board  
Division of Water Quality  
1011 I Street, 15<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Sacramento CA 95814  
[rnorman@waterboards.ca.gov](mailto:rnorman@waterboards.ca.gov)

Re: Comments on the Proposed Amendments to the Monitoring and  
Reporting Program for the Statewide General Waste Discharge  
Requirements for Sanitary Sewer Systems

Dear Mr. Norman,

The City and County of San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (San Francisco) respectfully submits the following comments on the amendments proposed to the Monitoring and Reporting Program for the Statewide General Waste Discharge Requirements for Sanitary Sewer Systems (SSS WDRs). We agree with views expressed by other organizations that some of these proposed amendments appear to be too substantive to qualify as mere reporting changes. Our comments, however, focus on the particular proposed change to require operators of combined sewer systems to report SSOs. For the following reasons, we believe this proposed change is inappropriate.

Of only two combined sewer systems in California, San Francisco operates the largest such system. Combined systems provide valuable environmental benefits in urban areas where stormwater can carry high concentrations of oil, metals, and other trash that is harmful to receiving waters. Last year, in addition to sanitary flows, we treated 6.8 billion gallons of stormwater which removed not only floatables but 1,600 metric tons of TSS.

Sewer systems designed to carry sanitary wastewater, and those designed to transport both stormwater and sanitary wastewater, are fundamentally different kinds of systems. Pipe sizes are different, storm operational strategies are different, maintenance issues have important differences (e.g., separate systems are often subject to inflow, infiltration and exfiltration problems while combined systems are generally not, combined systems have flushing capacities not found in separate systems), and costs are different (with combined systems being far more expensive given all the storage that must be built and maintained). Moreover, the regulatory concerns are different.

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General Manager



Sewage line breaks in a separate sewer collection system have the potential to reach storm drains which lead directly to receiving waters. In a combined system, however, wastewater from line breaks in the collection system return to the collection system; not receiving waters, and from there go to the treatment plant. In addition, while all discharges from a separate sewer system are prohibited, because of the treatment combined systems provide, there are regular, permitted discharges from a combined systems when rainstorms are too large to contain.

These fundamental differences between a separate sewer system and a combined sewer system are reflected in the fact that each has their own, individual regulatory scheme. The extensive regulatory regime for combined sewer systems is administered by the U.S. EPA, State Water Quality Control Boards, and Regional Water Quality Control Boards though a national CSO Policy and NPDES permits.<sup>1</sup>

One of the changes proposed by the MRP is to mix reporting requirements between these two different kinds of systems so that an SSO must be reported if it appears from a "Combined Sewer Drain Inlet" (Proposed MRP at 17) or has a final destination of a "Combined Storm Drain" (*id.* at 18). For the following reasons, we believe this would be an inappropriate change.

First, given the foundation and rationale for separate regulatory regimes, the imposition of separate system permit requirements on combined systems is inherently problematic. Second, combined sewer discharges are not SSOs. SSOs are "discharges of raw sewage from municipal sanitary sewer systems."<sup>2</sup> By definition, therefore, SSOs cannot occur in a combined sewer system. In addition, the EPA's NPDES Compliance Inspection Manual (2004) explicitly recognizes that SSOs do not include discharges from a combined system. "SSOs do not include combined sewer overflows (CSOs) or other discharges from the combined portions of a combined sewer system." Third, this proposed change is inconsistent with the authority provided by the SSS WDRs. The SSS WDR Order governs only entities which own or operate separate systems, not combined systems. See SSS WDRs at 1 ("Entities" which "are required to comply with the terms of this Order" are "[all] federal and state agencies, municipalities, counties, districts, and other public entities **that own or operate sanitary sewer systems . . .**") (emphasis added). Because the SSS WDRs' authority does not extend to owners or operators of combined systems, the MRP cannot compel them to report under its auspices.

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<sup>1</sup> San Francisco has consistently complied with these requirements to protect water quality. Our Oceanside Treatment Plant has functioned for 17 years without a permit violation and is viewed as a national model of sustainability. In addition, to ensure continued compliance and environmental stewardship of our receiving waters, San Francisco has embarked on a multi-billion dollar Sewer System Improvement Project on its own initiative.

<sup>2</sup> [http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?origan\\_id=4#72](http://cfpub.epa.gov/npdes/home.cfm?origan_id=4#72); See also SSS WDR (2003) at 5 ("Sanitary sewer overflow (SSO) – Any overflow, spill, release, discharge or diversion of untreated or partially treated wastewater **from a sanitary sewer system.**") (emphasis added).



Separate systems have their own regulations: the SSS WDRs. Combined systems have their own regulations: the CSO policy as implemented through NPDES permits. These systems should not be (nor are they authorized to be) comingled. We therefore recommend that the following changes be made to the proposed MRP amendments:

**Change #1** – Notification, Reporting, Monitoring, and Record Keeping  
Requirement A.9.d.i (Page 17/30).

"Select all assets from which the SSO appeared: *[allow multiple selections]*:

~~i. Combined Sewer Drain Inlet (combined sewer only)~~

**Change #2** - Notification, Reporting, Monitoring, and Record Keeping  
Requirement B.5.c (Page 18/30)

"5. SSO Final Destination *(select all that apply)*

~~c. Combined Storm Drain. (combined sewer only)~~

Thank you for your attention to our concerns and your consideration of our proposed changes. Please contact our staff lead for this matter, Ms. Laura Pagano (415-554-3109) for further discussion and dialogue relative to the proposed changes.

Sincerely,



Tommy T. Moala  
Assistant General Manager

