



CITY OF SANTA BARBARA SUSTAINABILITY COMMITTEE AGENDA REPORT

AGENDA DATE: June 1, 2023
TO: Sustainability Council Committee
FROM: Creeks Division, Sustainability & Resilience Department
SUBJECT: Recent Storm Impacts on Beach Water Quality

RECOMMENDATION:

That the Sustainability Council Committee receive a presentation on Winter 2023 Storm impacts to beach water quality.

DISCUSSION:

Large and frequent storms in Winter 2023 led to extended beach warnings, even when water quality had returned to acceptable levels. In addition, two sewage spills led to beach closures.

Background

State law (AB 411, 1997) requires that the County of Santa Barbara test ocean water weekly for indicator bacteria. When levels are above State criteria, warnings are posted to inform beachgoers of potential contamination. The criteria include short-term exceedances and monthly average exceedances. When tests return to levels below the criteria, beach warnings are lifted. Indicator bacteria are a traditional measure of contamination in drinking water but are less reliable for detecting sewage in natural environments. Many beaches exceed criteria during rain events due to high levels of indicator bacteria in creek and storm drain runoff. After the rain, beaches can remain under warning for weeks before the average (geomean) returns to baseline- even when weekly tests show bacteria levels below single sample criteria.

In addition, when a known leak or overflow causes untreated sewage to enter storm drains, creeks, and/or the beach, the County's Director of Environmental Health has discretion to order a beach closed. The closure remains in place until bacteria tests, including the geomean, are below the criteria. As noted above, this can take weeks, even when the sewage is not likely to remain at the beach.

Winter 2023

During the January 2023 storms, two sewage overflows occurred that led to beach closures. On January 9, 2023, a backup of sewage and release of approximately 4,000

gallons of untreated sewage into a storm drain at Vernon Rd. and Serena Rd., and subsequent discharge into Mission Creek, led to a closure of portions of West and East Beaches near the Mission Creek outfall. The beaches were re-opened on March 6, 2023.

A spill from a storm-damaged sewer main crossing over Sycamore Creek at the Mason Street Bridge led to discharge of approximately 5,000 gallons of untreated sewage into the creek and a closure of East Beach at Sycamore Creek. The closure was lifted on February 20, 2023.

Commented [CB1]: storm-damaged sewer main

BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:

This action does not have a budget or financial impact on the City.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT:

The Creeks Division conducts extensive research and monitoring to locate and eliminate sources of pollution to Santa Barbara creeks and beaches and communicate with the public about beach water quality.

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SUBMITTED BY: Alelia Parenteau, Sustainability and Resilience Director