

HOPE - Helping Our Peninsula's Environment
Box 1495, Carmel, CA 93921 - 831/624-6500

Alexis Strauss
Director, Water Division
Environmental Protection Agency

Wednesday, January 10, 2001

**Re: Pacific Grove's Pattern of Sewage Spills into Sea Otter Habitat Needs
Investigation and Serious Enforcement**

Dear Ms. Strauss:

I read with a sense of relief that your office has joined the lawsuit about sewage spills in Los Angeles. Thank you.

We are concerned about a similar ongoing problem here in Pacific Grove, California. There is a decade long pattern of increasing sewage spills from the city of Pacific Grove into Monterey Bay's National Marine Sanctuary, directly into Sea Otter habitat.

"In 1990 Monterey County had more beach closures than the entire state of New Jersey and in the late 1980's Lover's Point and the Cannery Row area of Pacific Grove were among the worst offenders." Monterey Herald Oct 27 1999

In spite of this, city funding of sewer repair is admittedly decreasing - in fact there appears to be zero dollars budgeted for sewer repair for fiscal year 2000-2001. (It is difficult to clearly determine the amount budgeted because it is mixed with several hundred thousand dollars of staff overhead which has little if anything to do with repair and upgrade replacement. An exasperated councilman's question "How much are we spending where the pick hits the ground?" brought a reply of "\$40,000.")

The pattern of spills seems to be increasing in severity and amount. One raw sewage spill last year exceeded 70,000 gallons. A raw sewage spill and beach closure this past week (headline January 10, 2001) was about a thousand gallons.

There have been at least twelve (12) Lover's Point beach closures since October 1999. In spite of the "closures" of Lover's Point Beach, many children still play in the water.

There were six (6) raw sewage spills into Lover's Point area in 2000 alone. (Besides the obvious disgusting mess, hundreds of gallons of deadly, toxic **chlorine** bleach are poured into our Bay during cleanup.)

We find these problems.

1) Pacific Grove is not taking this problem seriously. Multiple events of increasing amounts of sewage spilling is outrageously not acceptable. It took the Mayor, Ms. Koffman, six years to even ask for a report on the condition of the sewers. The 2000 Sewer System Analysis estimates **high priority repairs alone will cost 25 million dollars.**

2) Monterey County Environmental Health is not taking this seriously. Department head Walter Wong's comment to the newspaper "We'll have to give Pacific Grove a pep talk" is really not appropriate for the serial offender as we have here. The department scrambles to get the beaches open, but has **refused in writing to test the water even one time beyond what federal law requires.**

3) Sewage is harmful by itself, but possibly overlooked is the **deadly toxicity of the cleanup Chlorine** and its impact on our Bay's biota.

4) The beach closure warning signs are ineffective at preventing water contact activities.

We respectfully request that your agency please -

1) **Please investigate this pattern of spills** with no funding or repairs scheduled.

2) Please do something significant to catch the City's attention. The city has shown contempt for small slaps on the wrist.

3) Please require the City to use an **alternative to chlorine** for cleanup.

4) Please require the City to apply for a Clean Water Act permit and other applicable permits to discharge the chlorine or any alternative into the Bay. They will argue of course that spills are emergencies. But when spills occur with this frequency - they become a condition - not an event. We, at HOPE, look at the future with dismay knowing that there will be additional sewage spills and Pacific Grove will again use chlorine. (Can you please have staff let us know how much chlorine was used to cleanup this spill and the 70,000 gallon spill?)

4) **Please provide year-round daily testing** of the water by County Environmental Health for this known ongoing problem until Pacific Grove can go for two years without another spill. The City of Pacific Grove should pay for the increased testing.

5) Please require large orange warning signs so children and parents can no mistake the danger of water contact.

Sincerely, David Dilworth, Trustee