



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **Follow Up on San Pablo Creek Spill**

(RICHMOND, CA) Early Saturday, June 17, West County Wastewater (WCW) crews became aware of a sewage release affecting San Pablo Creek in El Sobrante. The location was San Pablo Creek, adjacent to 4108 San Pablo Dam Road, near Appian Way. Upon notice, crews responded and stopped the leak within 90 minutes.

### **Cause**

The cause of the release was a sewer line blockage of grease and disposable wipes (which should not be flushed down toilets). When this happened, the sewage was diverted to an overflow line designed to handle excess sewage flows or relieve back-ups. The backup revealed that the overflow line was damaged and, as a result, released sewage. Though staff are still investigating, the damage may have been caused by soil being washed away under the sewer line during heavy storms this past winter. This caused the pipe to break and release sewage into the storm drain below it, ultimately reaching the creek. The situation went unnoticed due to the lack of accessibility and visibility of the location, unlike most overflows that appear at ground level.

The overflow line was repaired on Friday, June 23, 2023. Crews continue to monitor the area visually, looking for any other weak lines or signs of other breaks. After the repair, the overflow line was reinspected and found in good condition. The investigation into the cause is ongoing.

### **Water Condition**

Sampling and testing in San Pablo Creek have been conducted within the affected area on three separate days since the date of discovery. The first sampling event brought back results showing that the creek upstream of the affected area had high coliform levels indicating significant background contamination independent of the spill. The location of the spill and downstream of the affected area showed higher levels of coliform but lowered significantly during the second round of samples collected the following day. The results of the third round of samples are pending.

### **Wildlife & Community**

As WCW staff continue to walk and monitor the incident area, there has been no noticeable effect on wildlife or immediate threat to public safety. Besides an odor noticeable on the day the line repair was done, which has gradually dissipated, there has been no known impact on the public. Caution signs have been in place around the incident area.

### **Communication**

The incident was reported to the State Governor's Office of Emergency Services monitoring board at 1:15 p.m. on June 17, 2023, and the initial report can be found [here](#). A public update was made at the WCW Board Meeting on Wednesday, June 21, 2023. The Regional Water Board was notified, and a press release was posted to West County through NextDoor and to the WCW website on June 19, 2023. WCW staff plan to attend the upcoming City of El Sobrante Municipal Advisory Committee meeting in July to discuss the spill.

### **Preventative Maintenance**

WCW's Collection Systems Operation division maintains a regular inspection, cleaning, and maintenance schedule for sewer lines throughout WCW's service area, including in proximity to many creeks, sloping hills, and difficult-to-access terrain. WCW serves approximately 34,000 residences and 900 commercial and industrial businesses, with a total population of nearly 100,000.

Besides the self-monitoring and self-reporting the WCW's crews practice, there are 14 level monitors in the sewer network which alert staff to potential sewage system overflows in areas that have historically experienced spills or are in vulnerable locations. Part of the work CSO crews perform is checking on areas that are difficult to access, monitoring during wet weather events, and regularly conducting preventative maintenance and cleaning. This sewer line at San Pablo Creek is on an increased cleaning schedule due to the amount of fats, oils, grease, and wipes that build up and cause these back-ups and overflows. WCW regularly promotes awareness at outreach events throughout the community and through social media, and we encourage all community members and organizations to partner with us in spreading the word about the negative impact flushing wipes down toilets and grease into sewer lines have on the environment.

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*West County Wastewater (WCW) was founded in 1921 to protect and serve the public health of the community through the construction and maintenance of a sewer system. Today, WCW provides sewage collection, treatment and disposal services to approximately 34,000 residences and 2,450 commercial and industrial businesses. WCW serves a total population of about 100,000 residents across 16.9 square miles. Governed by a five-member Board of Directors, WCW embraces practices that promote energy efficiency and environmental stewardship.*