

State Water Resources Control Board

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
July 19 2001
SWRCB 01-017

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State Water Board Approves Funding For Study Of Mission Bay Contaminants

SACRAMENTO — On July 19, 2001, the State Water Resources Control Board approved the expenditure of \$975,290 from the State Water Pollution Cleanup and Abatement Account to determine the presence and source of pathogenic viruses and bacteria in the recreational waters of San Diego's Mission Bay. The San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Board) has identified Mission Bay as impaired under the Federal Clean Water Act. Currently, Mission Bay does not meet water quality standards for swimming or fishing.

Mission Bay receives a constant discharge of water contaminated with high levels of fecal coliform and enterococci bacteria from known and unknown sources. The known sources of contamination are: episodic sewage spills from the two creeks or from direct discharge of sewage from blocked sewage collection pipes; stormwater that enters via 89 storm drains; waste discharges from recreational boats; roadway runoff during storm events; and waterfowl and domestic animal fecal matter.

Mission Bay is visited each year by approximately three million people and generates more than \$25 million in revenue for San Diego. The Bay is used year-round for numerous recreational activities including skiing, swimming, fishing, kayaking, rowing and sailing. It also hosts a diverse assemblage of species indigenous to the Southern California coastline, and is home to several wildlife preserves.

Currently, Mission Bay is monitored weekly at 20 stations for the presence of total coliform, fecal coliform and enterococci. If one or more of these indicator organisms exceeds a threshold, warnings must be posted at the affected beach area. In addition, portions of the beach areas must be temporarily closed when a known sewage spill enters the Bay. The number of beach postings and closures has increased over the last several years. Monitoring data from San Diego County Department of Environmental Health shows that in the years 1993-2000, Mission Bay was either posted or closed 1,100 days for bacterial contamination out of a possible 2,555 days. Analysis of the bacterial monitoring data for the past four years shows a 30 percent increase in the number of postings and closings.

Regional Board staff said there is a lack of sufficient, scientific-based information to delineate the exact source or sources of the contamination entering Mission Bay. It would be financially impractical to attempt to clean up all perceived sources of contaminations. Therefore, with the use of these funds, proper source identification will improve efforts to stop the contaminated discharges.

See <http://www.swrcb.ca.gov/agendas/2001/july/0719mtg.html> to review the cost analysis, policy issue, fiscal and regional impacts and the proposal for the approved Mission Bay cleanup funding.

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