

Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Room 2165, Rayburn House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

TELEPHONE AREA CODE (202) 225-6448

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THE MYTHS ABOUT SAN DIEGO'S SEWAGE, PART TWO

Dear Colleague:

H.R. 1943, the San Diego Coastal Corrections Act of 1995, is expected to be on the floor on Tuesday, July 25, as the first bill taken up under Corrections Day procedures. What needs correcting is a great many myths which have been generated about this bill. This letter continues our efforts to set the record straight.

Myth # 4: This bill would just allow San Diego to go on doing the level of treatment it is doing today, which doesn't seem to be harmful.

Wrong. The bill enacted last year allowed San Diego to get a waiver to go on doing its present level of treatment. This year's bill would allow San Diego to do not only less than secondary treatment, but also far less than it is doing today. Under this year's bill, San Diego could discharge sewage which was little better than raw sewage with a few chemical additives. Last year's enacted bill was a roll-back of legal standards to fit San Diego's current practice; this year's bill rolls back not only the legal standards, but also current practice. Congressman Filner offered in Committee an amendment to specify that San Diego should not be allowed to do less treatment than it is already doing, and his amendment was defeated on a straight party-line vote. This bill is clearly about allowing San Diego to provide less treatment than it does today.

Myth # 5: The federal treatment standards set by the bill really don't matter anyway, since the bill specifically provides that the "discharge is in compliance with all local and State water quality standards for the receiving waters." And allowing the State and local officials to make these decisions is what this is all about.

Wrong. The idea that State and local standards will apply in this case is a fraud. The limit of State and local jurisdiction is three miles off-shore, and the outfall pipe is over four miles long. The "receiving waters" are outside State and local jurisdiction! There are no State and local standards where the discharge occurs!

Myth # 6: This shouldn't be a big issue because there really is no harm done discharging sewage into a body of water as big as the Pacific Ocean.

Wrong. We are talking here about over 160 million gallons per day of marginally-treated sewage, which includes toxins and pathogens. Lowering the level of treatment, which this bill would allow, is defended as harmless by no knowledgeable person. But even the present level of treatment can cause very real harm if not dealt with very carefully. A case in point occurred three years ago, when San Diego's outfall pipe burst approximately three-fifths of a mile off-shore. Even with sewage treatment at the same level it is today, 4.5 miles of beaches had to be closed due to human health hazards from fecal coliform and other forms of contamination. And this bill would allow lower levels of treatment than were in place in 1992. What is at issue here is large volumes of marginally treated sewage, though some try to portray it as though it were as wholesome as chicken soup.

Don't just accept the glib assertions made on behalf of this bill. This one just doesn't pass the smell test.


signed

ROBERT A. BORSKI
Ranking Democratic Member
Subcommittee on Water
Resources and Environment

Sincerely yours,


signed

NORMAN Y. MINETA
Ranking Democratic Member
Committee on Transportation