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Baykeeper sues Richmond for Spilling Hundreds of Thousands of Gallons of Raw Sewage into the San Francisco Bay

Baykeeper made good on its promise to sue the City of Richmond if officials failed to address problems causing massive sewage spills. After five months of negotiations, Baykeeper and co-plaintiff West County Toxics Coalition (WCTC) served a lawsuit today against the City of Richmond under the Clean Water Act for sewage spills from the City's crumbling sewer collection and treatment systems. City partners Veolia Water North America Operating Services, West County Wastewater District, and the West County Agency were named in the lawsuit as well.

Richmond's own reports indicate that in the past month the City spilled approximately 150,000 gallons of sewage into the Santa Fe Channel, a tributary of San Francisco Bay, and another 84,000 gallons into a storm drain that leads to the Bay. In addition to human waste, bacteria, viruses, mold and harmful organisms, sewage may contain toxic and cancer-causing chemicals.

"During the last five months, Richmond has not taken concrete steps to fix its system, or made any real commitments to do so," said Sejal Choksi, the Bay Program Director for Baykeeper. "The City continues to foul its streets, creeks and popular fishing spots with raw sewage, creating a public health problem."

Baykeeper and WCTC notified the City of Richmond and other defendants of their intent to sue in July 2005 after documenting years of major spills from the City's collection system and pollution violations at its sewage treatment facility. In addition to repeated sewage overflows and leaks, high levels of pesticides and other toxic pollutants have been discharged illegally from the poorly run treatment facility.

"We have a situation where in just the past month hundreds of thousands of gallons of raw sewage have dirtied our water, endangering the citizens of Richmond," said Henry Clark with the West County Toxics Coalition.

"Richmond needs to upgrade and enlarge its collection and treatment systems so winter rains don't cause huge spills and overflows. My clients are seeking a Court order requiring Richmond to make those essential capital improvements," explained Layne Friedrich, attorney for the plaintiffs.

Baykeeper's mission is to protect and enhance the water quality of the San Francisco Bay-Delta Estuary and its watershed for the benefit of its ecosystems and human communities. West County Toxics Coalition addresses toxic emissions affecting the people of western Contra Costa County.

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