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Baykeeper to Address More Illegal Sewage Spills in the San Mateo Peninsula

The pollution watchdog group also co-sponsors bill to reduce sewage spills

San Francisco, CA (Today) – San Francisco Baykeeper just announced its intent to enforce the Clean Water Act against the Town of Hillsborough and the Burlingame Hills area of San Mateo County for sewage spills. A recently completed investigation of the Hillsborough and Burlingame Hills sewer systems revealed that these poorly maintained and operated systems suffer from high rates of spills to nearby creeks and the Bay, and are contributing to the City of Burlingame's illegal sewage discharges into San Francisco Bay near the Coyote Point recreation area. The pollution watchdog group sued the City of Burlingame earlier this year for Clean Water Act violations and for illegally discharging treated sewage water into Coyote Point. Today, Baykeeper put Hillsborough and Burlingame Hills on notice of impending legal action.

Baykeeper's recent investigations of sewage spills in the San Mateo Peninsula uncovered information that upstream sewage collection systems – also known as satellite systems – are a significant source of pollution to the Bay. Both because of regular spills of raw sewage to area waters, and because of their contribution to wet weather flows that overflow sewage plants, satellites such as Burlingame Hills and Hillsborough are huge and largely uncontrolled dischargers.

"Burlingame Hills and Hillsborough cannot continue to ignore their sewer systems and pollute our Bay shores," said Sejal Choksi, the Baykeeper. "The City of Burlingame has a significant sewage overflow problem, but the City itself may not be the sole cause. Our citizen enforcement actions will bring about a comprehensive solution."

Baykeeper's legal actions follow on the heels of a recent move by the State Assembly to address the problems with sewage spill infrastructure in California. AB 2986 (co-authored by Mark Leno and Jared Huffman and co-sponsored by Baykeeper) was passed by the State Assembly late last Wednesday night in a vote of 45 to 31. The bill requires the State and Regional Water Boards to annually grade every sewer collection system and sewage treatment plant in California in order to inform voters, rate payers, and local officials of problem systems before harmful, illegal sewage spills occur. The bill now moves to the Senate for consideration.

"The adoption of AB 2986 could significantly reduce sewage spills in the Bay Area," said Choksi. "All sewage systems will be placed on the same playing field and the public will know what the score is. We can ask failing systems to improve their performance and set up a win-win situation for our residents by creating a positive incentive for proactive maintenance and repair, thereby resulting in fewer harmful spills in our streets and creeks."

Founded in 1989, San Francisco Baykeeper is the Bay's pollution watchdog, using science and advocacy to reform policy and enforce clean water laws. www.baykeeper.org ###

