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Stopping Sewage Spills in the San Mateo Peninsula

Baykeeper Secures Agreement from Burlingame to Improve Sewage System, Files Two New Sewage Lawsuits Against Hillsborough and the Burlingame Hills Area

Burlingame, CA (August 20, 2008) – Frequent sewage spills in Burlingame will soon be reduced through a new agreement with San Francisco Baykeeper to make substantial improvements to sewage operations. The pollution watchdog group sued the City for Clean Water Act violations in February after investigations revealed that Burlingame spills thousands of gallons of raw sewage from its sewer lines every year and uses an unpermitted pipe to discharge treated wastewater to the Bay near Coyote Point, a popular windsurfing spot.

“We’re very pleased to have reached a cooperative agreement with Burlingame to prevent sewage contamination in local neighborhoods and in the Bay,” says Sejal Choksi, Program Director for San Francisco Baykeeper. “The City will now be taking the right steps to protect the health of both Burlingame residents and our waterways.”

The two entities reached a settlement today that will result in substantial improvements to Burlingame’s sewage infrastructure over the next ten years. The City has agreed to stop all spills during normal storm events, spend tens of millions of dollars to make collection system improvements and undertake a study to identify capacity problems and eliminate near-shore discharges. The City will also invest \$250,000 to fund projects that will help restore the San Mateo County watershed.

Unfortunately, the settlement between Baykeeper and Burlingame doesn’t mean the end of sewage spills in the South Bay. Like other cities in the Bay Area, the City of Burlingame contracts with “satellite” sewage collection systems in San Mateo County to accept and treat their sewage. These satellite systems are poorly maintained and operated systems with high numbers of spills to nearby creeks and the Bay. When Baykeeper discovered that these satellite systems contribute to the City of Burlingame’s illegal discharges into the Bay, the group filed lawsuits to similarly enforce the Clean Water Act against the Town of Hillsborough and the Burlingame Hills area of San Mateo County.

“We developed parallel legal actions against Burlingame Hills and Hillsborough to ensure that the cause of Burlingame’s sewage overflow problems is addressed and that all responsible parties work together towards a comprehensive solution for the San Mateo Peninsula,” said Choksi.

Baykeeper’s lawsuits against the City of Burlingame, Burlingame Hills and Hillsborough are part of a decade-long sewage campaign to end sewage spills in the Bay Area that is currently focused on the San Mateo Peninsula for a badly needed improvements. The group is also working with Assemblyman Mark Leno to pass AB 2986, legislation currently before the State Senate that would improve the transparency and accountability of sewage operations across the state by requiring the State Water Board to issue a letter grade to every sewage treatment plant and collection system in California. ###

San Francisco Baykeeper is the Bay’s pollution watchdog, using science and advocacy to reform policy and enforce clean water laws for the benefit of its ecosystems and human communities. www.baykeeper.org

