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San Francisco Baykeeper To Sue Burlingame for Sewage Spills and Illegal Discharges

San Francisco, CA – As part of its campaign to keep raw sewage out of San Francisco Bay, Baykeeper gave notice today of its intent to sue the City of Burlingame and its wastewater treatment plant for illegal sewage spills and overflows to the Bay. Burlingame’s crumbling sewer system is more than 80 years old and frequently overflows untreated sewage into homes and neighborhood streets. Additionally, Burlingame’s sewage treatment plant regularly discharges wastewater into San Francisco Bay through an illegal pipe located just north of Coyote Point.

“Burlingame’s sewer system has deteriorated to the point where the City can no longer properly dispose of the sewage it collects,” said Sejal Choksi, Program Director for Baykeeper. “The City needs to prioritize capital improvements and maintenance of the system so that Burlingame residents and the Bay aren’t exposed to raw sewage.”

Burlingame’s collection and treatment system serves over 30,000 residents and contains about 100 miles of sewer line in a 4.3 square mile service area. Monitoring data show that the city’s sewage spill rate is more than 30 spills per 100 miles of sewer line, compared with California’s median spill rate of 4 spills per 100 miles. The data also show that the discharge pipe near Coyote Point illegally releases a significant amount of wastewater – up to three million gallons a year since 2002.

Sewage spills and overflows are serious health and environmental hazards. Because local businesses and industrial facilities tie into the City’s sewage system, wastewater can contain a multitude of dangerous chemical solvents, heavy metals like lead and mercury and wastes that can wreak havoc on immune and reproductive systems of the Bay’s fish. Pathogens in untreated sewage can cause a variety of illnesses in humans. Bay Area residents may be exposed to these pathogens when swimming, wading, kayaking, windsailing or kiteboarding in the Bay, as well as when sewage backups occur in homes, streets, parks, schools and businesses.

In 2005, Baykeeper won a successful settlement against the City of Richmond which resulted in a commitment to \$20 million in system improvements over five years. The environmental watchdog group also sued the City of Vallejo, winning capital improvements of a similar magnitude. A suit against East Bay Municipal District in 2006 resulted in a Blue Ribbon Panel dedicated to getting to the root of overflows from crumbling municipal infrastructure in cities throughout the East Bay.

Founded in 1989, Baykeeper is a nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting the water quality of the San Francisco Bay for the benefit of the fish, wildlife and human communities who depend on it. Baykeeper uses advocacy, science and litigation to hold polluters accountable and enforce our clean water laws. ###



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