



Media release: February 11, 2008

Contact: Sejal Choksi, Baykeeper 925-330-7757 (to contact Nancy St. John of Burlingame, please inquire)

SAN FRANCISCO BAYKEEPER IS SICK OF SEWAGE

New Initiative Aims to Stop Sewage Spills

San Francisco, CA (February 11, 2008) – After over a decade of efforts to stop sewage spills in the Bay Area, today Baykeeper launched its Sick of Sewage Initiative to rein in the Bay's sewage spill problem. The initiative will involve:

- launching a number of investigations of sewage agencies with a history of sewage spills,
- filing lawsuits to compel system-wide improvements,
- conducting a public education campaign for how Bay Area residents can help reduce spills,
- working with state regulators and legislators to improve spill enforcement and penalties, and
- issuing a comprehensive report on wastewater treatment problems in the Bay Area.

"We're kicking our decade-long campaign into high gear today because sewage infrastructure throughout the Bay Area is causing major sewage spills that pollute the Bay and sicken residents," said Sejal Choksi, Program Director and attorney for Baykeeper.

To kick off the new initiative, Baykeeper took three major actions: (1) launched an independent investigation into the complete record of recent spills by the Southern Marin sewage agency, including failures to notify the public and other spills that may not have been properly reported, (2) submitted a request for updated records of other Bay Area cities with a history of sewage spills; and (3) filed a lawsuit in federal court against the City of Burlingame for sewage violations.

Baykeeper's research suggests that the City of Burlingame has one of the highest sewage spill rates in the Bay Area and has discharged over 10,000,000 gallons of wastewater through an unpermitted pipeline since 2002. The city's 80-year old underground collection system is in dire need of repair. Baykeeper is suing to force Burlingame to invest aggressively in fixing its sewer pipes and to cease illegal discharges to the Bay near Coyote Point, a popular recreational area.

"City officials claim they've been trying to fix the problem for the last 10 years," said Choksi. "So why aren't we seeing a significant reduction in Burlingame's sewage spills?"

"Burlingame clearly has a sewage problem, but the City seems to be in denial," said Burlingame homeowner and Baykeeper member, Nancy St. John. "In 2006, one of the City's main lines flooded raw sewage into my basement and that's unacceptable for a city that has the financial wherewithal to properly maintain its systems."

Similar lawsuits by Baykeeper in recent years have successfully forced Richmond and Vallejo to make major capital improvements to their sewage collection infrastructure and treatment plants. The environmental group also reached a successful settlement with the East Bay Municipal Utility District in 2005 over the District's failure to treat sewage to the level required by federal law. In addition to compelling cities to upgrade their systems, San Francisco Baykeeper has developed recommendations to help individuals reduce the burden on their towns' sewage treatment systems. (See attached). The tips are available at www.baykeeper.org.

"Even simple things like using less water when it's raining, can lessen the pressure on our aging sewer systems. All of us can help our cities make sure the Bay is not being used as a toilet," said Choksi. ###

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