

Taking on the Bay's Biggest Sewage Polluter

Photo: SFPUC via Public Records Act

San Francisco has a reputation for being one of the greenest cities in the country, but Baykeeper has discovered that it's also likely the Bay's biggest source of sewage pollution.



With your ongoing support, Baykeeper will take legal action to protect the Bay and the people who appreciate it.

The city has a combined sewage and stormwater system. That means when everything's working right, both sewage and stormwater should get some

level of treatment before being discharged into the Bay.

However—as Baykeeper has learned from our investigations—during heavy rains it's a very different story. When there's too much stormwater, the system gets overwhelmed.

San Francisco dumps on average 1.2 billion gallons of stormwater overflow polluted with trash and raw sewage into the Bay every year. That translates to 72 million gallons of raw sewage, enough to fill 110 Olympic-sized swimming pools. This also makes the city the single greatest source of the pollutants that cause fish-killing algae blooms.

Baykeeper's field science team captured photos of fecal matter floating in the waters of Mission

Creek. That's the main outfall point for the sewer system operated by the San Francisco Public Utilities Commission (SFPUC).

“Instead of fixing a known problem, SFPUC operates on the assumption that it's acceptable for its system to fail during every heavy storm,” said Baykeeper managing attorney, Eric Buescher. “That's why we've put San Francisco on notice that it's violating the Clean Water Act.”

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Pictured, above: Thanks to your support, we're holding SFPUC accountable for discharging sewage and trash into the Bay, like here in Mission Creek.





We Know Sewage Like It's Our Business

We didn't set out to become sewage experts. However, it became clear the issue would be a priority after a Richmond resident in the early 2000s called our pollution hotline to report a city sewer main spilling raw sewage into the street, storm drains, and her backyard.



Sewage and stormwater overflows are, by volume, the Bay's single biggest source of pollution.

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These days, when it's raining, you'll often find our investigators standing next

to a puddle, bundled in rain gear, taking water samples, and documenting everything meticulously. We do this—without complaint—to keep the Bay healthy. For Baykeeper, you know that's our top goal. And because you've been keeping us in the field, your support is making a difference.

Between 2000 and 2012, we used the Clean Water Act to compel 20 cities across the Bay Area to upgrade their sewage systems. We entered into binding agreements with Vallejo, San Carlos, Berkeley, Hillsborough, and Burlingame, to name a few. These efforts reduced sewage spills by an estimated 75% and kept harmful pollution from making its way into the Bay or flowing into neighborhoods.

Now with your continued support, Baykeeper's recent investigations have led to several new legal actions. We're helping San Jose fix

its stormwater system with significant infrastructure improvements, and we're urging Sunnyvale and Mountain View to do the same.

And as you see from the cover story, we just found evidence of a big sewage polluter. With you standing by our side, rain or shine, we will keep working to achieve a safer Bay for everyone!

Looking forward,

Sejal Choksi-Chugh,
Executive Director



Pictured, top: With your support, Baykeeper Staff Scientist, Ian Wren, tests stormwater runoff during a major storm in San Jose.



Stop Making Excuses, Sunnyvale and Mountain View

Two Bay Area cities, Sunnyvale and Mountain View, are discharging sewage pollution into creeks and streams flowing to the Bay—and finding every possible excuse to dodge accountability.

Your support is what fuels our work to hold the cities accountable.

After multiple rounds of water quality testing, Baykeeper’s investigators found high levels of bacteria pollution flowing into Bay tributaries from the cities’ storm drain outfalls.

Our sampling results showed *E. coli* levels as high as 50 times the legal limit, along with other harmful bacteria, like *enterococci*, from raw sewage.

Unfortunately, ever since we notified them about their illegal and unsafe pollution, Mountain View and Sunnyvale have done everything to avoid accountability. First, they attempted to get a judge to dismiss our case entirely. Then, the cities tried to use a recent Supreme Court ruling that limited the Clean Water Act to justify their negligence.

In both instances, the court sided with Baykeeper. With your continued support, we’ll make sure the cities comply with the law and make South Bay creeks safer for wildlife and recreation.

To take action on this and other urgent issues, visit our website: baykeeper.org/action

Above: Baykeeper’s scientists sampled at multiple locations in the South Bay (marked by orange dots) and found that Sunnyvale and Mountain view were contributing high levels of *E. coli* and other harmful bacteria flowing into Stevens Creek, Calabazas Creek, Sunnyvale East Channel, and Guadalupe Slough—all tributaries to San Francisco Bay. Your support allows us to hold these cities accountable for their pollution.

Give Today to Protect Bay Area Communities

Polluters threaten San Francisco Bay every day. That's why Baykeeper's field investigators, scientists, and lawyers work year-round to defend the Bay. Whether we're monitoring for a toxic algae bloom, watchdogging sewage overflows, or testing city runoff for harmful bacteria, we're constantly on the lookout to stop pollution that hurts the Bay and local residents.

Your support is key to defending the Bay.

Our donors keep Baykeeper on the water and in the courtroom, fighting to defend the Bay and prepare for climate change—because Bay Area communities deserve to be protected and resilient for the future.

Make a gift today to stop Bay polluters.

Use the enclosed envelope or visit:

[baykeeper.org/donate](https://www.baykeeper.org/donate)



Your support keeps our team on the water, patrolling by boat and drone to monitor for pollution.

Pictured: Field Investigator and Staff Scientist Aundi Mevoli takes samples to assess an algal bloom in the Bay.

