



Laguna Wastewater Treatment Plant February 2019 Flooding Impacts

Frequently Asked Questions - *Updated March 6, 2019*

Q: Why did the Laguna Wastewater Treatment Plant discharge into the creeks?

A: . During the atmospheric river weather event experienced the week of February 25th, the Laguna Wastewater Treatment Plant was impacted during the storm by localized flooding, and sewer flow rates coming into the plant were higher than ever recorded, placing strain on the system. Due to the extraordinary amount of water being treated by the Treatment Plant, available space in the storage ponds was being used up at a rapid rate. Fully treated recycled water was discharged into the creeks from the ponds to provide needed space for additional flows expected during the rest of the rainy season.

Q: What exactly was discharged into the creeks?

A: Only wastewater that had already been fully treated to permit regulations through the Wastewater Treatment Plant system — and which was ready for recycled- water reuse purposes — was discharged into the Colgan Creek, Laguna de Santa Rosa, and the Santa Rosa Creek. Absolutely no untreated wastewater discharged into the creeks from the Plant.

Q: Is the Laguna Wastewater Treatment Plant allowed to discharge into creeks?

A: The Laguna Treatment Plant has a discharge permit that allows recycled water discharge into these waterways, however, the discharges into the local waterways was done on an urgent basis without the same level of data gathering required in the Treatment Plant's permit due to the emergency nature of the operation. Because of severe flooding and dangerous conditions, Water Department Staff had to be escorted by the Fire Department's Swift Water Rescue Team to Delta Pond just to be able to get access to open the valves necessary to begin the emergency discharge. It was impossible for staff to access the discharge points for data gathering for multiple days, given the high floodwaters.

Q: What is being done to analyze the recycled water that was discharged to local creeks?

A: As staff safety and accessibility to data gathering points allow, the discharge from the ponds is being monitored for all parameters specified in the City's regulatory permit at the required frequency. Below are the list of components being monitored:

- Flow volume
- pH
- Mercury
- Nitrate
- Nitrite
- Ammonia
- Unionized Ammonia
- Organic Nitrogen
- Phosphorus
- Dissolved Oxygen
- Turbidity
- Temperature
- Conductivity
- Hardness
- Total Dissolved Solids
- Total Chlorine Residual
- Chlorodibromomethane
- Dichlorobromomethane
- Bis(2-ethylhexyl)phthalate
- Acute Toxicity
- Chronic Toxicity
- California Toxics Rule Priority Pollutants

Q: What is recycled water?

A: Simply put, recycled water is wastewater that's highly treated through multiple levels of disinfection and treatment. This high quality water contains essential nutrients that are safe for the irrigation of crops that are eaten raw, vineyards, playgrounds, golf courses, parks, cemeteries, freeway embankments, and street medians.

Recycled water is also frequently used in industrial processes, decorative fountains, fire suppression systems and much more. This water comes from sewage which is created when we use indoor drains; showers, toilets, sinks, dishwasher and washing machines.

Q: Does the recent discharge of recycled water impact drinking water?

A: No, Santa Rosa's drinking water operates on a separate system from the wastewater treatment system.

Q: Stormwater does not flow through the wastewater treatment system, so where did the excess wastewater flow come from?

A: The City's stormwater systems (rain water that travels through streets to storm drains and culverts) does drain directly to our local water bodies and not to the sewer system. However, the Treatment Plant still typically experiences an

increase in the flow of wastewater during rain events. While we can't pinpoint all sources, we know rainfall typically seeps through manhole covers, cracked pipes or cracks in the wastewater system infrastructure and gets into the wastewater system creating the flow increase. Santa Rosa experienced the highest on-record daily rainfall totals on Tuesday, February 26th with 5.66" inches of rain as reported by the National Weather Service. This would correlate with the record-setting wastewater flow increases recorded at the treatment plant which were more than 5 times over the normal winter average. (Wastewater flow rates went from a winter average of 19 million gallons a day to over 105 million gallons a day).

Q: Why did the City of Santa Rosa Proclaim the Existence of a Local Emergency?

A: The Treatment Plant experienced significant flooding. As the City has learned in previous situations, damage isn't always readily visible until staff have time to make full assessment. The proclamation is the first step to seeking potential necessary state and federal support and resources, should they be needed. Making the emergency declaration also defines for our regulators what the situation was when staff were forced to discharge recycled water without providing the same level of data gathering required by the City's permit (staff could not reach the access points because of significant localized flooding – they had to be boated out by emergency personnel to even open the valves for the discharge). Additionally, at the time of the proclamation, the Treatment Plant system was experiencing significant strain as a result of flooding, and another atmospheric river was in the forecast. Not knowing what further impacts the system may sustain from another atmospheric river event, it was an urgent, emergency situation.

Q: Is there anything citizens can do to help with reducing wastewater flow to the Treatment Plant?

A: The record-setting atmospheric weather event caused the strain on the treatment plant system which led to the need for discharge, not customers taking a shower, washing dishes, flushing toilets, and other activities that generate wastewater. There is nothing that individual customers can do specifically to resolve this significant-weather-related issue. Additionally, since the evening of Thursday, February 28, 2019, wastewater flow rates are back below the maximum capacity threshold at the Treatment Plant.