

Answers to questions about...

Urban Runoff Diversions

The Orange County Sanitation District (OC San) is a public agency that provides wastewater collection, treatment, and recycling services for approximately 2.6 million people in central and northwest Orange County.

OC San has two plants that treat wastewater from residential, commercial and industrial sources.

OC San accepts the diversion of urban runoff to the sewer for treatment to remediate various public health and environmental problems. Such diversions are allowed when it is not economical or practical to address the public health or environmental problems through traditional best management practices.

What is Urban Runoff?

Urban runoff is water that is generated by daily activities such as lawn irrigation, hosing down sidewalks, and car washing. As the water flows across the urban landscapes, it becomes contaminated with nutrients, pesticides, heavy metals, toxic chemicals, bacteria, and viruses. Once the contaminated water reaches our creeks, rivers, and shoreline, the pollutants carry the potential to harm wildlife and native vegetation, spoil recreational opportunities, and even cause human illness through contact with recreational waters.

Why did OC San take action?

Investigation into the 1999 Orange County beach closures due to high bacteria levels along the Huntington Beach shoreline suggested that dry weather urban runoff flowing into the ocean from the surrounding watersheds may have caused or contributed to the bacterial contamination. As a result of these closures, OC San began to accept urban runoff into the sewer system, thus establishing the Urban Runoff Diversion Program. In June 2002, Assembly Bill 1892 amended OC San's charter to formally allow the diversion and management of dry weather urban runoff flows.

What are OC San's latest steps?

On June 28, 2013, the OC San Board of Directors adopted Resolution No. 13-09 expanding the availability

of dry weather urban runoff treatment from 4 million gallons a day (MGD) to 10 MGD. This latest policy opened the door to additional flows to help remediate other environmental problems, including the excessive loading of nitrogen and selenium in the upper and middle Newport Bay Watershed.

How much Urban Runoff has OC San treated?

Since 1999, OC San has treated over 10 billion gallons of dry weather runoff. OC San expects to receive over 420 million gallons per year if current discharge trends remain unchanged.

Are Urban Runoff Diversions regulated?

Yes, OC San's Resource Protection Division administers the Dry Weather Urban Runoff Diversion Program through the issuance of a discharge permit for each of the diversion structures. The permit establishes discharge limits, constituent monitoring, and flow metering requirements, as well as provides guidelines that specifically prohibit storm runoff and authorizes discharge only during periods of dry weather. OC San also conducts quarterly sampling and analysis of the urban runoff discharges to ensure discharge limit compliance with the various regulated constituents.



Answers to questions about urban runoff diversions

Diversion Locations



Are diversions a success?

Yes! OC San's Dry Weather Urban Runoff Diversion Program is successful in helping to maintain the quality of the receiving waters along the Orange County Coastline. This year's Heal the Bay annual report card for beach quality detailed that Orange County had another great year of summer dry weather grades with 98 percent of sites scoring A and B grades. Orange County's beaches also performed well overall during winter dry weather, with 94 percent of locations receiving A and B grades.

OC San's Dry Weather Urban Runoff Diversion Program provides an important economic benefit to the Orange County economy by maintaining the coastline's reputation as a desirable tourist destination. By helping to keep our beaches open, the program continues to provide a significant benefit to the beach-going public.

The program's expanded role of selenium reduction furthers the water quality objectives of the Newport Bay Watershed by enhancing the estuarine environment for the threatened and endangered species that inhabit the area. Finally, the program is instrumental in providing vital protection to the areas of special biological significance along Orange County's coastline.

For more information

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