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U.S. announces \$2 billion sewage spill agreement for City of Los Angeles

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Terms Include Improved Sewer Lines, Environmental Restoration and Penalties

LOS ANGELES In one of the largest sewage cases in U.S. history, the Department of Justice, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board, Santa Monica Baykeeper and a coalition of Los Angeles community groups have reached a \$2 billion settlement with the city of Los Angeles over years of sewage spills.



Tunneling for installation of the new East Central Interceptor Sewer.
Photo courtesy of the City of Los Angeles

Under the terms of the historic agreement, the city of Los Angeles will rebuild at least 488 miles of sewer lines, clean 2,800 miles of sewers annually, enhance its program to control restaurant grease discharges, increase the sewage system's capacity, and plan for future expansion.

With approximately 6,500 miles of sewer lines serving almost 4 million residents, the city operates the largest sewage collection system in the country. Since 1994, the city has experienced over 4,500 sewage spills.

The United States and the regional board are settling their civil penalty claims against the city for a total of \$1.6 million, which they will share equally. The city will pay \$800,000 to the U.S. Treasury. The regional board is directing its \$800,000 to local environmental improvement projects that the city will perform.

This settlement is a groundbreaking effort to address all causes of sewage spills and odors in the city of Los Angeles. The terms of the settlement require a proactive approach designed to prevent problems from developing in the city's system. The city is required to undertake more aggressive maintenance practices and advanced planning to identify and repair or replace problem sewers before they spill.



"The joint enforcement action will bring long-term significant improvement to Los Angeles'

sewer system," said Tom Sansonetti, Assistant Attorney General for the Justice Department's Environment and Natural Resources Division. "This demonstrates that federal and state agencies and local organizations can work together to achieve compliance with our environmental regulations."

"Sewage overflows are a major problem across the country, and bringing systems into compliance is one of EPA's top enforcement priorities," said Tom Skinner, Acting Assistant Administrator for the EPA's Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance. "The Los Angeles sewer system is one of the largest, making this settlement significant both in southern California and nationally."

"Today's settlement recognizes and memorializes the city's commitment to repair and replace its aging sewage infrastructure, to serve the needs of generations to come," said Wayne Nastri, Administrator of the EPA's Pacific Southwest office in San Francisco. "This investment will protect neighborhoods and millions of beachgoers from the ill effects of sewage spills."

"This settlement agreement is well worth the hard work that went into it," said Francine Diamond, Chair of the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board. "Soon it will not be commonplace to have spills resulting in raw sewage flowing down our streets and polluting our waterways. The agreement is a great victory for community members, as well as everyone concerned about public health and clean water."

"This is a historic moment in Santa Monica Baykeeper's fight for clean water," said Tracy Egoscue, Executive Director of Santa Monica Baykeeper. "Baykeeper supports the leadership of the city of Los Angeles and their commitment to reduce sewage spills in our community."



Preparation of pipe for installation in the new Northeast Interceptor Sewer.
Photo courtesy of the City of Los Angeles

In total, the city of Los Angeles will perform \$8.5 million in environmental projects in addition to the work required to improve its sewer system. The environmental improvement projects required under today's agreement include projects throughout the city to restore streams and wetlands and to capture and treat polluted storm drain flows.

Among the projects under consideration are:

- North Atwater Creek restoration
- South Los Angeles stormwater treatment project at 54th and Avalon St.
- Hazard Creek and wetlands restoration project
- Headwork's Spreading Ground wetlands restoration
- Legion Lane Park LA River revitalization and habitat restoration
- Sycamore Grove stream daylighting
- Cabrillo Beach water quality enhancement project.

The Santa Monica Baykeeper filed its action against Los Angeles in 1998, and the EPA, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board and the community groups filed their action in 2001. The community groups include Baldwin Hills Estates Homeowner's Association, Inc.; Baldwin Hills Village Garden Homes Association; United Homeowners Association;

Village Green Owners Association; and Concerned Citizens of South Central Los Angeles.

The agreement takes effect when signed by the District Court judge following a 30-day public comment period.

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