

**EDITORIAL****Cleaner than the River**

Last week's meeting of the North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board had some scary overtones for those who want to minimize or eliminate treated sewage discharges into the River. Three members of the board took West County Supervisor Ernie Carpenter to task as he tried to convince the board that Santa Rosa should be required to build new storage ponds before a five-year extension of their interim plan was approved.

James Wilkey, Spencer Flournoy, and Captain Steward, who have all been appointed since the the big spill and illegal discharges of 1985, indicated they were convinced that Santa Rosa had already achieved a technological solution to their sewage disposal problems. In a sometimes caustic interchange with Carpenter, the three board members (two of whom reside in the Santa Rosa area) pummeled Carpenter for his nonsensical opposition to greater river discharges. After all, argued the three, Santa Rosa has spent millions of dollars to improve its sewage treatment and they now produce "near-Perrier quality" effluent. Santa Rosa's wastewater is cleaner than the river, said Wilkey (a statement that wouldn't be true if the water board were doing its job—witness its lackadaisical attitude toward pesticides and L-P's toxin contamination). The board then proceeded to vote 7-0 to allow for "emergency" 5 percent discharges to continue for the next five years.

The statements of the three board members are indicative of a radical change in board membership and position. Only three members of the board that imposed a building ban on Santa Rosa to pressure the city into upgrading its system in 1985 still remain—and two of those three, Anna Sparks and Joyce Crockett, have consistently been supportive of Santa Rosa's positions. No resident of the lower Russian River sits on the board; no one who lived through dirty spills and the economic disaster that followed.

Instead, despite the year's past vows of Santa Rosa officials to get their effluent out of the river, the board has shifted far enough to where it is now okay to promote river discharges as safe and economical, and where one board member is even bold enough to suggest that the city should look into drinking its own wastewater.

Santa Rosa's sewage is cleaner, but as long as a pipe remains, and more and more treated sewage is released into the river, the chances of spills remain. Santa Rosa still has not proven that they can manage their system. In a system that works, emergency releases would be the exception not the rule. Four emergency releases in four years is not a record to be proud of. Messrs. Wilkey, Flournoy, and Steward, strong advocates of regulation by bottom line, should realize that that line was shattered in the lower Russian River in 1985.

**And the Laguna**

How does Santa Rosa's wastewater reach the river? Through a release to that troubled wetlands, the Laguna de Santa Rosa. Last Saturday environmentalists, farmers, politicians, and Santa Rosa and Sebastopol sat down to discuss the problems and promise of a restored Laguna, partly through the use of reclaimed wastewater. The meeting indicated that people with disparate ideas and interests can work together, although some farmers remain suspicious of new regulation. But thanks to the inclusion of county and Sebastopol residents, and state Fish and Wildlife in the plan to restore the Laguna, this project will not be driven by one special interest. It may just succeed.

SEPT 89 THE PAPER