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## EDITORIAL

# Discharges into the Laguna must stop

The illegal discharge of wastewater into the Laguna de Santa Rosa by the city of Sebastopol and the Barlow Company is totally unacceptable and must stop.

That is not just our opinion, but the opinion of the state Regional Water Quality Control Board, which recently issued a "cleanup and abatement order" after it was discovered that apple processing waste was leaking into the Laguna.

The unauthorized discharge of waste apparently occurred when the wastewater was allowed to leak from the city's former sewer ponds, used by Barlow for temporary storage, into the Laguna. While it appears that the discharges were inadvertent, they are being blamed on gopher holes in the levees that surround the ponds, that does not diminish the severity of the situation. A spill occurred and it should not be allowed to happen again.

An unknown amount of highly concentrated waste was discharged into a waterway, one that is used as a municipal, domestic, industrial and agricultural water supply and provides crucial habitat for wildlife and fisheries. The Laguna is part of the Russian River system, and while the spills occurred when the river was close to flood stage and the waste was diluted, the potential for repeated discharges represents an unacceptable threat to the river environment.

We are not suggesting that the Barlow Company stop using the ponds to store its waste. The company is a valuable economic player in the community, providing jobs and supporting the local agricultural economy. The temporary and seasonal use of the ponds can and should be conducted in a safe manner, so long as the system is adequately maintained and regulated in cooperation with the city of Sebastopol. But that has not always happened.

It is the city of Sebastopol and the Barlow Company's responsibility to maintain the integrity of the ponds to ensure that such discharges, leaks, or other spills do not occur. City and Barlow officials have indicated a willingness to do whatever is necessary to maintain the system to adequately protect the Laguna from future spills. We laud that attitude.

We hope an agreement can be quickly reached that will allow Barlow and the city to continue to use the ponds and still maintain the environmental integrity of the Laguna.

— B.W.D.