

For several days immediately following the report of the rupture of the Industrial Waste Force Main on September 4, 1997, multiple representatives of city staff, The Barlow Company, Regional Board staff, Department of Fish & Game, Mosquito Abatement District were in more or less constant contact in an attempt to locate the rupture and arrive at an appropriate cleanup technique. Meetings occurred in the field and in city offices between the city and Barlow nearly every working day. City staff, Barlow and their bio-remediation consultants and Water Board staff met on Sept. 23, Sept. 26 and Oct. 10. The purpose of these meetings was for Barlow and the city to report to the Water Quality Board staff on our remediation efforts and to receive their feedback and further instructions with regard to the cleanup. During these meetings the opinion was expressed by board staff that the cleanup efforts were correct and acceptable, and appeared to be producing good results. Reports to the City Council were made at their meetings of Sept. 16 and Sept. 30. A daily diary of events concerning this situation were sent weekly to the City Council, made available at the Sebastopol Library and published on the Sebastopol Web Site, from Sept. 20 to Oct. 24. Comments about progress of the cleanup were based on the public information being disseminated by the city.

The efficacy of the treatment methods (bio-remediation) of the 1997 Laguna discharge have been questioned because the effluent stored in Pond 3 continues to have a bad odor and the pond is being similarly treated. The bacterial treatment of the Laguna spill was done in combination with intensive aeration and re-circulation pumping, within a moving body of water which contained some apple waste in combination with its natural flow. During the remediation period we also experienced rainfall which produced runoff from the entire watershed to the Laguna lying upstream of Sebastopol. The liquid in Pond 3 during the same period consisted of undiluted Barlow wastewater (except for whatever amount of rain fell directly into it).

Water quality sampling of the spill area has been conducted on a number of occasions, with the assistance of qualified professional staff of the city of Santa Rosa. The sampling results have demonstrated measurable improvement. Visually, the water has returned to it's "normal" appearance, and there has been no smell from the water in the Laguna for more than a month.

The Oct. 22 commentary describes the City Council as taking a "negligent attitude" and "repeatedly denying there is a problem" and asks "What sort of message does this send to city staff or to Barlow?"

The Council listened to reports from city staff and Barlow's consultants with interest and concern during the recent episode. City staff has aggressively pursued the cleanup, informed the City Council and the community as to our progress, and continues to do everything in our power to ensure that future problems such as this do not occur. At no time has The Barlow Company, city staff or the City Council attempted to diminish the gravity of the recent discharge.

*(Paul Bertant is the Sebastopol city manager)*

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