

Date: February 29, 2024  
For Immediate Release  
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### **Information Regarding Reported Sewage Spill**

The Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors held a Board Meeting on February 27, 2024. The administrative agenda included addendum item A-19 pertaining to the Santa Barbara County Public Health Department's ("SBCPHD's") updates on the sewage spill that occurred upstream from Goleta Beach sometime between about 8:00 p.m. on February 16, 2024 and about 8:00 a.m. on February 17, 2024 ("February Sewage Spill"). During the agenda item discussion and public comments, Goleta West Sanitary District ("GWSD" or "District") heard the concerns of the County and public regarding the reported sewage spill. Below is a recap of information available at this time. GSWD will continue to provide updates to the public as additional information becomes available.

GWSD is currently focused on completing its investigative report — a critically important part of the required response process — which will be reviewed by the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board.

#### **About GWSD**

- GWSD has provided wastewater collection from the Western Goleta Valley and Isla Vista since 1954.
- GWSD provides treatment of its wastewater through a contract with Goleta Sanitary District ("GSD") for treatment at a regional treatment plant.
- GWSD has six certified, credentialed staff members.

#### **The February Sewage Spill**

- On Saturday, February 17, 2024, around 8:00 a.m., the February Sewage Spill was discovered. GWSD immediately mobilized, and the pump to the pipeline was stopped by 8:30 a.m. the same day.
- The February Sewage Spill began sometime around 8:00 p.m. on Friday, February 16, 2024, and before 8:00 a.m. on Saturday morning, February 17, 2024. It is important to note that the February Sewage Spill did not continue over a period of several days, as has been inaccurately reported.
- Current estimates are that approximately one million gallons were released at the spill site, which was close to a tributary to Tecolotito Creek. A portion of this volume was recovered and disposed of at the regional wastewater treatment plant.

#### **Notice and Reporting Activities**

- On Saturday, February 17, 2024, GWSD notified the California Office of Emergency Services ("CalOES") and the SBCPHD of the spill by telephone.
- CalOES provides a streamlined notification process that reinforces local responses to incidents through inter-agency notification and coordination in support of local governments. GWSD's

notice to CalOES triggered CalOES to immediately notify the appropriate regional water quality control board, local public health department, and local office of environmental health. As required, GWSD separately provided direct notice to SBCPHD and other agencies on the CalOES recipient list to ensure that relevant agencies received notification.

- GWSD is in direct communications with several other agencies and local authorities, including the SBCPHD, CalOES, Santa Barbara City Planning Department, Santa Barbara Airport, City of Goleta, California Coastal Commission, California Department of Fish and Wildlife, California Public Health Department, University of California Santa Barbara, and Goleta Sanitary District. GWSD is also in communications with the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board to ensure notice, testing, monitoring, reporting, and response requirements are met.
- GWSD is committed to providing updated information to all applicable agencies as soon as it is available. This is why the public has seen the estimated spill volume increase over the last week. Based on field observations, the District's initial estimate of the spill volume was 30,000 gallons. On Wednesday, February 21<sup>st</sup> of last week, GWSD's cleanup operations suggested that closer to 500,000 gallons had spilled. As soon as this amount was verified, GWSD provided updated notice and reporting to all relevant agencies. Similarly, as more data became available near the end of the week, and revised calculations indicated that an estimated 1,025,000 gallons spilled, this amount was reported to the required reporting agencies.
- GWSD met with Supervisor Laura Capps and City of Goleta Council Members James Kyriaco and Luz Reyes-Martín at the site of the spill and has provided comments in response to the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors at its February 27, 2024, meeting.
- GWSD is also issuing regular updates to ensure information is accurate and timely.

### **Water Quality Monitoring**

- GWSD immediately began required water quality sampling at the spill site as well as upstream and downstream of the spill location and continues to monitor water quality data.
- GWSD understands that water quality samples are also being collected in the ocean water at the mouth of Goleta Slough by SBCPHD and the Santa Barbara County Flood Control and Water Conservation District ("Flood Control") as a result of the Flood Control's dredging activities.
- Water quality may also be influenced by the large rain events last week that initially negatively impact water quality by stirring up sediments and increasing runoff as well as Flood Control's dredging activities which were occurring in the Goleta Slough and at Goleta Beach that potentially started on February 20, 2024, and concurrently with some of the District's emergency response.

### **Beach Closures**

- SBCPHD oversees beach closures, and more information on the status of beach closures throughout the County can be found here: <https://www.countyofsb.org/2263/Ocean-Water-Monitoring-Program>.

- Prior to the spill, SBCPHD had already issued a beach advisory for Goleta Beach on February 16, 2024, due to forecasted rain. The heavy rains began Sunday evening and lasted into Monday, February 19, 2024.
- Following the rains, GWSD received information that Goleta Beach was potentially closed for the Flood Control's dredging activities starting on or around February 20, 2024.
- Following notice of the spill to SBCPHD on Saturday February 17, 2024, GWSD continued to follow up with SBCPHD to confirm the continued closure of Goleta Beach.
- GWSD understands that SBCPHD closed Goleta Beach on February 21, 2024, due to the sewage spill.

### **Next Steps**

- GWSD is focused on completing its investigation and certified reporting, which must be submitted by March 3, 2024. This report will be reviewed by the Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board. The District is also required to submit a follow-up technical report.
- GWSD takes any sewage spill very seriously, especially one of such magnitude, and is committed to completing all responsive actions necessary, continuing to cooperate with applicable local, state, and federal agencies, and reviewing its policies and procedures to ensure that such an incident does not occur in the future.
- GWSD will continue to update the public as new information becomes available. In the meantime, public and media inquiries can be directed to [bmccarthy@goletawest.org](mailto:bmccarthy@goletawest.org).