

**SANTA BARBARA COUNTY  
BOARD AGENDA LETTER**



Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
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**Agenda Number:**  
**Prepared on:** 3/22/04  
**Department Name:** Public Health  
**Department No.:** 041  
**Agenda Date:** 4/6/04  
**Placement:** Departmental  
**Estimate Time:** 60 minutes  
**Continued Item:** YES  
**If Yes, date from:** 1/6/04

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**TO:** Board of Supervisors

**FROM:** Roger E. Heroux, M.P.A.  
Public Health Department Director

**STAFF CONTACT:** Richard Merrifield, Interim Director  
Environmental Health Services

**SUBJECT:** Recommendations Related to the "Septic System Sanitary Survey for Santa Barbara County"

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**Recommendation(s):**

That the Board of Supervisors:

- A. Direct Public Health Department staff to continue disbursement of State septic-to-sewer conversion funds to public sewer agencies working with interested homeowner groups to fund engineering studies for sewer extension projects.
- B. Direct Public Health Department staff to continue working with Planning & Development Department staff to incorporate information and recommendations from the Septic System Sanitary Survey for Santa Barbara County into the General Plan process.
- C. Direct Public Health Department staff to continue working with local sewer agencies and septic tank pumpers to explore the need for a septage treatment facility in Santa Barbara County.

**Alignment with Board Strategic Plan:**

The recommendations are primarily aligned with Goal No. 2, A Safe and Healthy Community in Which to Live, Work, and Visit; and Goal No. 7, A Community that Fosters the Safety and Well-Being of Families and Children.

**Executive Summary and Discussion:**

Today's hearing is continued from January 6, 2004, at which time your Board received and filed a report summarizing the results of a Septic System Sanitary Survey for Santa Barbara County. The survey assessed 24 focus areas that contain 4,300 (45%) of the approximately 9,500 septic

systems in the county. The focus areas were then assigned a “problem rating” based on their potential impacts on public health and water quality.

At the January 6, 2004 hearing, your Board did not accept Recommendations B through D related to a proposed countywide wastewater management plan and related programmatic environmental impact. These recommendations were continued with the following direction to staff:

1. Return with a report that focuses on the most serious problems with prioritized areas and projects rather than a countywide management plan
2. Address issues in the Los Olivos and Santa Ynez areas in the General Plan process
3. Investigate the need for improved septage (septic tank pumpings) treatment and disposal
4. Provide information related to licensing of septic tank pumpers
5. Respond to the suggestion of a revolving fund for environmental impact reports
6. Respond to the suggestion to make greater use of graywater

The recommendations presented today are intended to provide appropriate follow up to the sanitary survey in accordance with your Board’s redirection.

Background:

In January 2001, the Public Health Department received a \$2,000,000 state budget appropriation to provide directed incentives to homeowners to convert from septic tank systems to public sewer. Two projects were described in the funding agreement with the State Water Resources Control Board: the “Septic System Sanitary Survey Project” and the “Onsite Sewage Disposal System Remediation Program.” The project components and related appropriations were as follows:

Septic System Sanitary Survey Project:

Review of existing files and databases	\$ 50,000
Field surveys	140,000
Dye testing	30,000
Water quality testing	<u>30,000</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$250,000</b>

Onsite Sewage Disposal System Remediation Program:

Engineered studies	\$300,000
Identification and mapping of applicable areas	50,000
Outreach to homeowners, sanitary districts, etc.	10,000
Loan program development	40,000
Loan base	<u>1,350,000</u>
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 1,750,000</b>

Based on direction provided by your Board at the January 6, 2004 hearing, staff recommends the following measures at this time:

Recommendation A:

Public Health Department staff would continue working with interested homeowner groups and sewer agencies to fund engineering studies for conversion of septic systems to public sewer connections where feasible. To date, the Public Health Department has received a request from the Braemar Ranch Homeowners Association and the City of Santa Barbara to fund a preliminary engineering study for approximately 100 properties at an approximate cost of \$25,000. We have also received inquiries from homeowners in the Calle Cita / Sunset Road area and the Santa Ynez Community Services District. The Hope Ranch Owner's Association also expressed interest in an engineering study prior to completion of the survey.

To address Board comment #1, focus areas and their problem ratings assigned in the sanitary survey are ranked in priority groups of high, medium and low in Attachment 1. Three of the focus areas rated Medium-High were placed in the High category based on their greater potential threat to water quality. The recommended management options are described in Attachment 2 and listed for each focus area in Attachment 3. Any of the focus areas for which public sewer is recommended would be eligible to have an engineering study funded, if there is a cooperating sewer agency and homeowner interest.

A revolving fund for environmental impact reports was also suggested at the January 6<sup>th</sup> hearing (Board comment #6). While this concept has merit, previous exhaustive efforts to set up a revolving fund for homeowner loans were not successful due to low interest rates and relatively high administrative costs. Neither the Public Health Department nor the County Treasurer-Tax Collector has the staffing or expertise to handle this type of service. Loan repayments could take considerable time, up to 20 years or more. For these reasons, it is recommended that the available funds be used for one-time costs to improve wastewater management in the County.

Recommendation B:

Public Health Department staff would continue working with Planning & Development Department staff to incorporate information and recommendations from the sanitary survey into the General Plan process. This responds to the direction of your Board to address wastewater planning issues in the existing General Plan process (Board comment #2). Information and findings of the sanitary survey have been incorporated into the draft Santa Ynez Community Plan and the Toro Canyon Plan. It is anticipated that the sanitary survey will be a valuable resource for other community planning efforts as well.

To further support planning efforts in the County, Environmental Health Services plans to prepare a presentation for the County Planning Commissions to summarize the findings and recommendations of the sanitary survey. Staff will also use the survey as a reference when recommending conditions of approval for discretionary projects reviewed by the Planning Commissions and the Zoning Administrator.

Recommendation C:

Public Health Department staff would continue working with local sewer agencies and septic tank pumpers to explore the need for a septage treatment facility in Santa Barbara County. This issue was brought up in the staff presentation and in comments by the Sanitation Agencies

Manager's Association (SAMA) at the January 6<sup>th</sup> hearing (Board comment #3). Although somewhat outside the scope of the sanitary survey, availability of adequate treatment facilities for septage (septic tank pumpings) is a relevant issue because proper operation of septic systems requires that accumulated solids and grease be removed from the tanks on a regular basis. While pumping frequency can vary depending on specific use patterns, the general recommendation is every 3 to 5 years.

The City of Santa Maria receives and treats the majority of septage from northern Santa Barbara County. The City of Santa Barbara accepts a limited amount of septage from the South Coast area. The remainder is taken to Ventura County. Pumpers have occasionally experienced some delays and limits on quantity or disposal times at all of the treatment plants.

Because owners of septic systems are not rate-paying constituents of sanitary districts, there has been little planning for future septage disposal needs. Septic tank pumpers essentially rely on the unused treatment capacity of wastewater treatment plants that serve sewered areas. Many sanitation districts, especially smaller ones, are reluctant to accept material from septic tanks because it uses a large amount of the plant's treatment capacity relative to the volume of waste and presents concerns such as unknown sources, odors, and traffic. Preliminary discussions with the plant managers in Santa Maria and Ventura County indicate there they have adequate treatment capacity to handle anticipated loads of septage at this time.

In a letter to the Public Health Department dated August 22, 2003, SAMA recommended that the County develop a regional receiving station to provide pre-treatment of septage. The Regional Water Quality Control Board made a similar recommendation in their comment letter on the sanitary survey. Public Health Department staff agrees septage treatment is a legitimate concern, but there is very little information currently available to determine if it is actually a significant problem.

Planning for septage treatment and disposal would be best accomplished on a regional or countywide basis, through an engineering study to examine the current waste stream size and characteristics, hauling costs and the feasibility of different treatment methods. A stand-alone treatment facility would be quite expensive and difficult to permit due to land use and environmental concerns. A pretreatment facility associated with an existing treatment plant would seem to be the most logical approach to improve septage treatment capacity. The City of Santa Maria and Laguna County Sanitation District have each expressed interest in plant improvements to enhance septage-handling capacity.

#### Licensing of Septic Tank Pumpers (Board comment # 4):

Comments at the January 6<sup>th</sup> hearing included a recommendation for licensing of septic tank pumpers and regulation of hauled wastes by the Public Health Department. Septic tank pumpers are already required by the California Health & Safety Code to register with the local health department. The Public Health Department has an active pumper registration and vehicle inspection program supported by pumper fees. In addition, the County Code requires pumpers to file an inspection report whenever a septic tank is pumped in Santa Barbara County. Those reports include the source and destination of the waste material.

Expansion of the pumper registration program to include other hauled wastes, such as grease, and new manifesting requirements to track their movement is outside the scope of Public Health

Department responsibilities and is not recommended at this time. Should your Board wish to pursue this matter, staff would recommend a cooperative approach with SAMA and the Regional Water Quality Control Board, both of which have a direct interest in hauled wastes other than septage.

Increased Use of Graywater (Board comment # 5):

Comments at the January 6<sup>th</sup> hearing also included a recommendation for increased use of graywater as a partial solution to septic system issues in Santa Barbara County. Graywater contains many of the pathogens found in untreated sewage. Minimum design standards for graywater systems are found in the California Plumbing Code, which has been adopted by Santa Barbara County. These design standards require underground dispersal of graywater and specify that the main septic system may not be reduced in size. Graywater systems therefore take away valuable space that is often needed for the main septic system and add to the expense of wastewater disposal. Finally, by removing graywater from the waste stream, the resulting discharge from the septic tank is much stronger in biochemical oxygen demand, resulting in shorter life for the disposal field and actually increasing the chance of failure.

**Mandates and Service Levels:**

There is no mandate for Santa Barbara County to have undertaken a countywide septic system sanitary survey or to accept State Budget Act funding for onsite sewage disposal incentives. The Sanitary Survey and Onsite Sewage Disposal System Remediation Project were approved as part of a work plan by the Board of Supervisors on October 24, 2000, and subsequently by the State Water Resources Control Board. All work on the survey was completed in accordance with the scope of work outlined in the approved work plan. Disbursements of State funds are required to be consistent with the approved work plan.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

Currently, the unexpended balance of the original \$2,000,000 in State funding is \$1,661,000 and is designated in the Public Health Department Special Revenue Fund. Of the \$339,000 that has been expended, \$250,000 was spent for the Septic System Sanitary Survey Project and \$89,000 has been spent for a Mission Canyon septic survey and for staff time and materials in holding community meetings and in exploring the feasibility of a septic to sewer incentive program for homeowners.

There are no facilities impacts.

**Special Instructions:**

Return one (1) copy of the minute order to the Public Health Department, Contracts Unit

**Concurrence:** N/A

Enc: Attachments 1, 2 & 3

## Focus Area Rankings for County of Santa Barbara

<u>Action Priority Rating</u>	<u>Survey Ranking</u>
<b>High</b>	
Los Olivos	High
Janin Acres	High
Sunset/Carol	High
Santa Ynez	High
Rincon*	High
Sand Point Road*	High
Vista Vallejo	Med High
Arroyo Paredon	Med High
Padaro Lane*	Med High
<b>Medium</b>	
Ballard	Med High
Mission Canyon	Med High
Buena Vista	Med High
Hope Ranch**	Med High
Sycamore Creek	Med High
Veronica Springs	Med High
Painted Cave	Med High
Toro Canyon	Med High
Upper Fairview	Medium
Cold Springs Road	Medium
<b>Low</b>	
Via Chaparral	Low Med
Lake Marie Est.	Low Med
Shepard Mesa	Low Med
La Buena Tierra	Low
Orcutt	Low

\*These focus areas are currently pursuing public sewerage as a wastewater management option to onsite septic systems, with voting by residents to form new sewer assessment districts expected in 2004.

\*\* Braemar Ranch/Campanil Hill is included in response to community interest expressed to Public Health staff. Although not rated by the Questa Survey, this City of Santa Barbara area most closely resembles Hope Ranch in terms of geographic location and risk assessment.

## **Focus Area Recommendations**

### Case-by-Case Upgrades and Management

This recommendation essentially reflects the current management program for septic systems in the county. It involves review of new, repaired, modified and replacement onsite systems on an individual lot-by-lot basis to determine if upgrades in treatment and disposal are needed. At this time, such upgrades are limited to basic compliance with applicable code requirements, but could include dual disposal fields and alternative or enhanced treatment technologies for improving the quality of wastewater before being discharged into the environment. These types of mandated upgrades are included in the pending State regulation package mandated by AB 885. This level of management was recommended for Shepard Mesa, Upper Fairview, La Buena Tierra, Via Chaparral, Lake Marie Estates and the Orcutt area.

### Mandatory Inspection and Upgrade

While the survey praised the current Voluntary Maintenance Program for septic systems, it recommended a more rigorous program for some focus areas due to age and density of systems, difficult site constraints and the general lack of information about septic system conditions and actual or potential threats to public health and water quality. This option would require that onsite septic systems be serviced and inspected on a routine schedule (e.g., every three to five years) and upgrades required based on the inspection report. This level of management was recommended for Arroyo Paredon, Buena Vista Creek, Cold Springs, Sycamore Canyon, Veronica Springs and Painted Cave.

### Onsite Wastewater Management Plan

The survey recommends onsite wastewater management plans for areas where soil-geologic conditions and lot sizes (density) are judged to be reasonably suitable for use of onsite systems, but other factors call for special management efforts to ensure the long-term effectiveness of onsite disposal to avoid serious environmental problems. Such factors include the number of systems, a record of problems or failures and the proximity and threat to water resources.

Wastewater management plans may be countywide or customized to a specific area, and can include a variety of wastewater treatment options. The Regional Water Quality Control Board's Basin Plan adopted in 1983 recommends a countywide plan as well as specific plans for "upper Santa Ynez Valley" and "Los Olivos/Ballard." The sanitary survey recommended area-specific wastewater management plans for Toro Canyon, Mission Canyon, Hope Ranch, Ballard and Santa Ynez.

Some area-specific requirements typical of a wastewater management plan have already been adopted by your Board or imposed by the Regional Water Quality Control Board. Examples include wastewater flow restrictions for commercial lots in Los Olivos, restrictions on the use of drywells in Los Olivos and Janin Acres, and the development standards contained in the Toro Canyon Area Plan. In addition, the Santa Ynez General Plan Advisory Committee has started to address the relationship between wastewater management and other land use issues in the draft Santa Ynez Community Plan.

### Public Sewer

The survey recommends that conversion from septic systems to public sewer be considered for several focus areas where sewers are reasonably available, warranted by site conditions and appear to be the best long-term wastewater management approach for the area. Consideration of public sewers was recommended for Rincon Point, Sand Point Road, Padaro Lane, Sunset Road/Carol Avenue area, Vista Vallejo, selected portions of Santa Ynez and Janin Acres.

### Community Wastewater Facility

The survey recommends a feasibility study for stand-alone treatment facility for the town of Los Olivos. This recommendation is based on the community's relative isolations from existing sewer communities, the very high density of development, and poor soil and groundwater conditions for onsite systems. The Survey also recommended that, for Los Olivos, consideration be given to mandatory septic system upgrades on the larger lots or a joint project with Ballard.



## Sanitary Survey Recommendation Summary Chart

Focus Area	Mandatory Maint.	Mandatory Upgrades Case-by-Case	OWMP	Community Wastewater Facility	Public Sewer	Studies	Specific Comments
<b>High Priority</b>							
Los Olivos		<b>X</b> Selected areas		<b>X</b>		Consider WWTP, sewer to Solvang, joint system w/ Ballard, altern. technology	
Janin Acres					<b>X</b>		City of Solvang
Sunset/Carol					<b>X</b>		City of Santa Barbara
Santa Ynez			<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>		Pressure sewer to SYCSD if feasible
Rincon					<b>X</b>		Support on-going efforts to connect to Carpinteria San Dist.
Sand Point Rd					<b>X</b>		Support on-going efforts to connect to Carpinteria San Dist.
Vista Vallejo					<b>X</b>		City of Santa Barbara
Arroyo Paredon	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>					Re-assess in 3 years
Padaro Lane					<b>X</b>		Support on-going efforts to connect to Carpinteria San Dist.
<b>Medium Priority</b>							
Ballard			<b>X</b>			Consider joint system w/ Los Olivos	Consider multiple solutions
Mission Canyon			<b>X</b>				
Buena Vista	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>		Encourage connection to sewer / Re-assess in 3 years
Hope Ranch			<b>X</b>				

## Sanitary Survey Recommendation Summary Chart

<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Mandatory Mnt</b>	<b>Mandatory Upgrades Case-by-Case</b>	<b>OWMP</b>	<b>Community Wastewater Facility</b>	<b>Public Sewer</b>	<b>Studies</b>	<b>Specific Comments</b>
Sycamore Creek	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>		Encourage connection to sewer / Re-assess in 3 years
Veronica Springs	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>		Encourage connection to sewer / Re-assess in 3 years
Painted Cave	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>					Re-assess in 3 years
Toro Canyon			<b>X</b>				Toro Canyon Plan
Upper Fairview	<b>X for commercial &amp; multi-family</b>	<b>X</b>					Re-assess in 3 years
Cold Springs Rd	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>			<b>X</b>		Encourage connection to sewer / Re-assess in 3 years
<b>Low Priority</b>							
Via Chaparral		<b>X</b>					Re-assess in 3 years
Lake Marie Est.		<b>X</b>					Re-assess in 3 years
Shepard Mesa		<b>X</b>					
La Buena Tierra		<b>X</b>					Re-assess in 3 years
Orcutt		<b>X</b>					Re-assess in 3 years

\* Options marked with an asterisk are back-up options to the option marked with an X.

**KEY:**

OWMP = Onsite Wastewater Management Plan

WWTP = Wastewater Treatment Plant