California Regional Water Quality Control Board
Central Coast Region

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M. Rooney
Secretary for
Environmental
Protection

Pete Wilson
Governor

October 2, 1998

Dr. Susan Zepeda, Director
San Luis Obispo County Health Agency
P. O. Box 1489
San Luis Obispo, CA 93406-1489

Dear Dr. Zepeda:

PUBLIC NOTIFICATION OF SEVERITY OF SEPTIC SYSTEM FAILURES IN LOS OSOS

Recently we obtained one of the public information brochures distributed at the County Government Center regarding "Sewage". The brochure describes the County's resources management system, which includes the septic system maximum severity designation "Level of Severity III". Severity III occurs when 25% of the septic systems in a specific area fail and the County Health Department and Regional Board find public health is endangered.

Upon learning of the County's resource management system, Regional Board staff contacted your department to inquire what sort of public notification has been provided to the community of Los Osos regarding the Level of Severity III existing there. Telephone contact as well as review of a September 2, 1998 letter to Robert van't Riet from Michael Doherty of your staff, indicate you may be waiting for the Regional Board to find public health is endangered by failing septics in Los Osos before designating the area as Level of Severity III. If this is the case, please let me be clear...**The Regional Water Quality Control Board finds failing septic systems in Los Osos endanger public health.** This has been the case for many years and we would be happy to provide background information you may wish to review on the matter. In my opinion, septic systems in Los Osos meet the Level of Severity III criteria as described in the pamphlet and the public should be notified accordingly.

I believe much of the delay in resolving wastewater problems in Los Osos has been due to public misinformation or lack of information on the subject. For example, the September 2, 1998 letter mentioned above and a June 8, 1998 letter from your department to Donald Burlingame include statements which lead the reader to believe high levels of coliform bacteria in surface waters surrounding Los Osos are nothing more than normal storm runoff (letters attached). The fact that the type of sampling referenced in these letters could not differentiate natural sources from human waste sources of bacteria is not mentioned. Citizens look to their Health Department for

direction regarding potential health issues. In the case of Los Osos, I believe your department should clearly inform the citizens of the community regarding public health threats resulting from failing septic systems.

Sincerely,

Roger W. Briggs
Executive Officer
Central Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

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Task: 121-01
File: SLO CSA 9, Los Osos

cc: California Coastal Commission
Bob Van't riet
Co. Engineering