## FACT SHEET LOS ANGELES RIVER TRASH TMDL

## California Regional Water Quality Control Board Los Angeles Region January 2001

On January 25, 2001, the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region (Regional Board) will hold a public hearing to consider a proposed Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for trash in the Los Angeles River. The TMDL establishes a 10-year plan for reducing the amount of trash that is discharged to the Los Angeles River and establishes a final waste load allocation of zero trash discharge. The Los Angeles River Trash TMDL is one of 92 that are scheduled for adoption pursuant to a consent decree between the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) and Heal the Bay, Santa Monica BayKeeper and Terry Tamminen, signed on March 22, 1999.

The federal Clean Water Act requires TMDLs to be established for waterbodies where pollutants exceed the applicable water quality standards or objectives. Such waterbodies are considered to be "impaired" because the water quality is not adequate to fully support their designated beneficial uses (e.g., fishing, swimming, etc.). The Regional Board conducted an assessment of its waters in 1996 and 1998, as required pursuant to Section 305(b) of the Clean Water Act. As a result of these assessments, it was determined that the amount of trash in the Los Angeles River exceeded the applicable narrative water quality objectives. The following narrative objectives apply to trash<sup>1</sup>:

- "Waters shall not contain floating materials, including solids, liquids, foams, and scum, in concentrations that cause nuisance or adversely affect beneficial uses."
- "Waters shall not contain suspended or settable material in concentrations that cause nuisance or adversely affect beneficial uses."

The Los Angles River Trash TMDL contains the following elements:

<u>Problem Statement:</u> The problem statement includes a description of the watershed, the extent of trash discharges to the river, and a description of the impairment to beneficial uses. Trash was reported to impair recreational uses of the river and to harm wildlife. Wildlife living in the river and riparian areas may be harmed by trash via ingestion, through physical entanglement, and from the degradation of spawning and nesting areas.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Water Quality Control Plan, Los Angeles Region, p. 3-9.

<u>Numeric Target:</u> The numeric target for protecting beneficial uses in the Los Angeles River is zero discharge of trash. Although it has been suggested by some that beneficial uses may be fully supported at some level greater than zero, staff found no studies to support a higher number. The numeric target includes an implicit margin of safety.

<u>Source Analysis</u>: Municipal storm drains were found to be the primary conveyor of trash to the Los Angeles River.

<u>Waste Load Allocations</u>: The TMDL establishes a schedule for progressively reducing the amount of trash that may be discharged to the river by 10 percent per year, with the final waste load allocation to be set at zero. The final waste load allocation will be re-evaluated and may be raised if future studies demonstrate that a higher waste load allocation will be sufficiently protective of the beneficial uses within the river.

<u>Baseline Load Allocations:</u> The baseline load allocation is the base for computing the progressive reductions in the waste load allocation. For example, the waste load allocation for the first year will be 90 percent of the baseline load allocation, and for the second year, 80 percent, and so on. Each city within the watershed, the County of Los Angeles, and Cal-Trans (referred to as the Permittees) are assigned a default baseline load allocation, which was developed from available data. The TMDL provides for refinement of the default baseline load allocation by using data developed during a 2-year baseline monitoring program, which may be extended to 4 years at the option of the Permittees.

Implementation Plan: The TMDL will be implemented through the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System storm water permits. Discharges will be estimated based on a mass balance calculation involving the measured daily generation rate (DGR), less the trash that is removed via street sweeping and/or structural trash collection devices (e.g., catch basin inserts).<sup>2</sup> Alternatively, areas served by "full capture" trash collection devices, as defined in the TMDL, will be considered to have a zero trash discharge, provided that the devices are appropriately sized and maintained.

<u>Compliance Determination</u>: The volume of trash discharged to the river is dependent on the amount and intensity of rainfall available to mobilize trash—except in the case of a zero trash loading. Therefore, compliance will be determined for a storm year, beginning on October 1 and extending through September 30 of the subsequent calendar year. Additionally, due to the variation in precipitation patterns from year to year, and other difficulties in achieving a specific waste load allocation during any single storm year, the TMDL evaluates compliance based on a rolling three-year average.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The Daily Generation Rate (DGR) is defined as the average amount of litter deposited to land during a 24 hour period, as measured in a specified drainage area.