



# California Regional Water Quality Control Board

## Los Angeles Region



Recipient of the 2001 *Environmental Leadership Award* from Keep California Beautiful

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Governor

### NOTICE OF HEARING / NOTICE OF FILING

**TO:** Any Interested Person

**FROM:** California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region  
320 West 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
Los Angeles, CA 90013

**DATE:** March 26, 2007

**SUBJECT:** Notice of Filing Submitted under section 21080.5 of the Public Resources Code

**PROPONENT:** California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region

**TITLE:** Amendment to the *Water Quality Control Plan - Los Angeles Region (4)*

**CONTACT:** Renee Purdy DeShazo, (213) 576-6783      Sam Unger, P.E., (213) 576-6622  
Basin Planning Coordinator      Section Chief  
Regional Programs      Regional Programs

**LOCATION:** Los Angeles Region

**DESCRIPTION:** Proposed Basin Plan amendment to incorporate site-specific ammonia objectives for select inland surface waters in the San Gabriel River, Los Angeles River, and Santa Clara River Watersheds

On June 7, 2007, the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region (Regional Board) will consider adoption of a proposed amendment to Chapter 3 of the *Water Quality Control Plan - Los Angeles Region (4)* (Basin Plan) to incorporate site-specific ammonia objectives for select inland surface waters in the San Gabriel River, Los Angeles River, and Santa Clara River Watersheds. The public hearing is scheduled for Thursday, June 7, 2007 at 9:00 AM, at the Simi Valley City Hall, 2929 Tapo Canyon Road, Simi Valley, California.

Copies of the tentative resolution, proposed Basin Plan amendment, staff report, and substitute environmental documents for the site-specific ammonia objectives are posted on the Regional Board's website. The web address is <http://www.waterboards.ca.gov/losangeles/html/bpaRes/bpa.html>. If you would like these documents in hard copy, please call Sandra Kelley at (213) 576-6619 or fax your request to her attention at (213) 576-6686.

Actions to amend the Basin Plan will be taken in accordance with a regulatory program exempt under section 21080.5 of the Public Resources Code from the requirement to prepare an environmental impact report under the California Environmental Quality Act (Public Resources Code section 21000 et seq.) and with other applicable laws and regulations. Additional regulations or policies consistent with the general purpose of the proposed Basin Plan amendment and complementary to the proposal may be

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developed at the hearing as a logical outgrowth. The Regional Board will take action on the proposed amendment after hearing staff's presentation and public comments.

The Regional Board is soliciting comments on the tentative resolution, proposed Basin Plan amendment and supporting documents. In order to review and assess comments, Regional Board staff must receive written comments and exhibits no later than 5:00 PM on May 14, 2007. Failure to comply with these requirements is grounds for the Board to refuse to admit the proposed written comment or exhibit into evidence (California Code of Regulations, title 23, section 649.4).

Comments should be submitted to:

California Regional Water Quality Control Board  
Los Angeles Region  
320 W. 4<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 200  
Los Angeles, California 90013  
ATTN: Renee Purdy DeShazo

Oral presentations should be summarized in writing to the extent possible. Time limitations on presentations may be imposed. All exhibits including charts, graphs and other testimony presented at the public hearing must be left with the Regional Board for inclusion in the Administrative Record. Please contact Renee Purdy DeShazo at (213) 576-6783 if you have any questions.

### **Background**

The proposed amendment would incorporate site-specific 30-day average (i.e., chronic) water quality objectives for ammonia in several waterbodies in the Los Angeles Region into Chapter 3, "Water Quality Objectives" of the Basin Plan. These site-specific objectives would replace the equivalent existing inland surface water objectives for ammonia in these waterbodies. The Regional Board's staff report and a technical report prepared by Larry Walker Associates, Inc. (LWA) on behalf of the Cities of Los Angeles and Burbank and the County Sanitation Districts of Los Angeles County discuss the scientific basis for the site-specific objectives. The technical report is distinguished from the Regional Board's staff report in that it does not present the recommendations of Regional Board staff.

Ammonia is a pollutant routinely found in the wastewater effluent of Publicly Owned Treatment Works (POTWs), landfill leachate, and runoff from agricultural fields where commercial fertilizers and animal manure are applied. Because ammonia is toxic to aquatic life, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (US EPA) Office of Water has determined that control of ammonia discharges to surface waters of the United States is necessary to protect aquatic life uses in surface waters of the United States.

When developing its 1985 water quality criteria for ammonia, the US EPA reviewed data regarding the relationship of ammonia toxicity to various physicochemical properties of the test water, especially temperature and pH. The US EPA concluded in the 1985 document that ammonia toxicity can depend on the ionic composition of the exposure water, but the effects were not clear and consistent enough to include other variables in the criterion. In 1999, the US EPA published an update to its 1985 ambient water quality criteria for ammonia titled "1999 Update of Ambient Water Quality Criteria for Ammonia" (hereafter referred to as 1999 update). The US EPA reiterated, "there is still insufficient understanding and information to account for these effects in the criterion and they will have to be addressed using water-effect ratios or other site-specific approaches" (US EPA 1999).

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Studies cited in the 1999 update indicate that ammonia toxicity may be reduced in waterbodies with high hardness and elevated concentrations of certain ions. The hardness and ionic concentrations of many waterbodies in the Los Angeles Region are much higher than concentrations found in the laboratory water used in the national studies that were the basis for the national ammonia criteria.

The purpose of this proposed Basin Plan amendment is to derive site-specific 30-day average objectives for ammonia that will be sufficiently protective of aquatic life, taking into account ionic composition in local receiving waters. The proposed site-specific objectives were developed using US EPA's "Guidelines for Deriving Numerical National Water Quality Criteria for the Protection of Aquatic Organisms and Their Uses," "1999 Update of Ambient Water Quality Criteria for Ammonia," and "Interim Guidance on Determination and Use of Water-Effect Ratios for Metals" (US EPA 1985, 1999, 1994).

Table 1 describes the affected waterbodies. The site-specific objectives will be implemented through the Regional Board's existing permitting and enforcement authority, and in particular, through TMDLs and NPDES permits for POTWs discharging to these waterbodies.

**Table 1**  
**Description of Affected Waterbodies**


Reach Name	Upstream and Downstream Points
Los Angeles River Reach 5	Sepulveda Basin
Los Angeles River Reach 4	Sepulveda Dam to Riverside Drive
Los Angeles River Reach 3	Riverside Drive to Figueroa Street
Burbank Western Channel	to confluence with LA River
San Jose Creek	to confluence with San Gabriel River
San Gabriel River Reach 2 and 3	Confluence of San Jose Creek to Firestone Boulevard
San Gabriel River Reach 1	Firestone Boulevard to the Estuary
Coyote Creek	to confluence with San Gabriel River
Rio Hondo above Whittier Narrows Dam	Upstream of Whittier Narrows Dam
Santa Clara River Reach 6	Bouquet Canyon Road Bridge to West Pier Highway 99
Santa Clara River Reach 5	West Pier Highway 99 to Blue Cut gauging station

The proposed site-specific objectives are equal to or higher (less stringent) than the current 30-day average objective for inland surface waters contained in the Basin Plan. However, the toxicity tests show that these higher levels will still protect aquatic organisms against toxicity in the affected waters at the same level as US EPA's nationally derived criteria. The greatest differences between the present objective and proposed site-specific objectives occur at low temperatures where early life stages of fish (ELS) are absent. The magnitude of the difference decreases as temperature increases, holding pH constant. Under the *ELS absent* condition, the proposed site-specific objectives are 1.5 to 2.3 times greater than the current 30-day average objective, on average. Under the *ELS present* condition, the proposed site-specific objectives are 1.35 to 1.54 times greater than the current 30-day average objective, on average.

The POTWs discharging to these waterbodies are expected to be the primary parties involved in compliance with the site-specific objectives. If approved, the ammonia site-specific objectives would be reflected in revised effluent and receiving water limitations for the affected POTWs and waterbody reaches, subject to antidegradation and antibacksliding requirements. It is not foreseeable that the amendment would instigate

new or different compliance measures other than those required to comply with the current objectives. Therefore, the additional economic cost, if any, of this proposed amendment should be negligible and limited to additional monitoring costs.

Additional receiving water monitoring will be required of dischargers subject to site-specific objectives to evaluate whether the ammonia site-specific objectives are as protective of beneficial uses as US EPA's recommended criteria are intended to be. This additional monitoring will be required through the discharger's NPDES permit monitoring and reporting program. If additional monitoring indicates a change in the chemical characteristics of the waterbody or toxicity, the Regional Board may reconsider the site-specific objectives.

  
Samuel Unger, P.E.  
Section Chief  
Regional Programs

3-26-07  
Date