

November 14, 2011

OWTS Policy
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 "I" Street, 15th Floor
Sacramento, California 95814

Submitted via email: owts_commentletters@waterboards.ca.gov

SUBJECT: Comment Letter – DRAFT OWTS Policy Documents

On behalf of the Sacramento Area Sewer District (SASD), thank you for the opportunity to provide comments regarding the Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Policy (OWTS), and the Substitute Environmental which was released on September 30, 2011. SASD provides wastewater collection service to 1.1 million residents throughout the greater Sacramento area. There are over 10,000 onsite septic systems in Sacramento County, of which approximately 3,800 are within SASD's service area.

SASD takes its mission seriously to protect public health and the environment. To the extent possible, SASD, along with other Sacramento County agencies, continue to facilitate conversion of septic systems to public sewer collection systems. In addition, we encourage and support utilization of the public sewers in urban and infill developments.

SASD's main concern with the OWTS Policy relates to mandating requirements for individual property owners to convert or upgrade their systems without adequate funding sources to assist in these efforts.

GENERAL COMMENT REGARDING THE DRAFT OWTS POLICY

Based on SASD's experience with onsite wastewater treatment systems, financial considerations are the primary factor affecting the ability of a property owner to connect to public sewer. Although, SASD is prohibited by law to spend ratepayers' money to build new collector pipe, SASD offers low-interest loans to facilitate septic conversions. However, the cost to design, construct, or retrofit a new or existing onsite wastewater treatment system is expensive and connecting to public sewer is often even more expensive. For instance, the costs for removal of a septic system and connection to a public sewer system can range from \$21,000 to \$46,000 or more for each property owner. As a result, the added financial burden affects property owners of most income levels. To compound this problem, many existing septic systems are in

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low income areas. Without identifying funding sources for property owners, the proposed OWTS Policy will be difficult to implement.

SPECIFIC COMMENTS TO THE DRAFT OWTS POLICY

1. **Tier 1 – Low Risk New or Replacement OWTS, Page 19, Section 8.1.1:** Minimum OWTS Design and Construction Standards states “*A qualified professional employed by a local agency, while acting in that capacity, may design or review and approve a design for a proposed OWTS.*”

SASD Comment: The OWTS Policy should clarify that it is not giving a qualified professional who designs an OWTS the authority to approve that design. It would be a conflict of interest for a qualified professional to approve their own design.

2. **Tier 2 – Local Agency OWTS Management Program, Page 27, Section 9.3.8** states “*Establish terms, conditions, and timing for monitoring and assessment of groundwater and local surface water quality on a regional and localized basis across the entire jurisdictional area of the local agency for the possible effects of OWTS effluent. At a minimum this will include testing for nitrates and pathogens, but may include other constituents deemed appropriate for assessing the impacts of OWTS on water quality.*”

SASD Comment: The draft OWTS Policy requires the installation of monitoring wells and collection of samples necessary to determine the source of pollutant(s) generated for mixed use areas (septic systems and agriculture/livestock) that are adjacent to a surface water or groundwater source. The Policy should identify the responsible party (state or local agency) and funding sources for this investigative monitoring work. Pollutants found in groundwater may originate from a variety of sources including historical migration. The property owners and public agencies should not be unnecessarily burdened with sampling costs for pollutants that could be of unknown origin.

SASD appreciates the opportunity to provide comments on the draft Onsite Wastewater Treatment System Policy Document, and we encourage the SWRCB to ensure that any additional mandated requirements have an equal corresponding environmental benefit. If you have questions or comments regarding the items above, please feel free to contact Lysa Voight at (916) 876-6038 or VoightL@sacsewer.com.

Sincerely,



Terrie Mitchell
Manager, Legislative and Regulatory Affairs

NKB:vjb

cc: Stan Dean, SASD District Engineer
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