

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

ORDER: WQ 2000 - 11

In the Matter of the Petitions of
**THE CITIES OF BELLFLOWER, ET AL., THE CITY OF ARCADIA, AND
WESTERN STATES PETROLEUM ASSOCIATION**
Review of January 26, 2000 Action of the Regional Board
and
Actions and Failures to Act
by both the
California Regional Water Quality Control Board,
Los Angeles Region and Its Executive Officer
Pursuant to Order No. 96-054,
Permit for Municipal Storm Water and Urban Run-Off Discharges Within
Los Angeles County
[NPDES NO. CAS614001]

SWRCB/OCC FILES A-1280, A-1280(a) and A-1280(b)

BY THE BOARD:

On July 15, 1996, the Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) issued a revised national pollutant discharge elimination system (NPDES) permit in Order No. 96-054 (permit) to the 85 incorporated cities and the county within Los Angeles County (the County).¹ The permit covers storm water discharges from municipal separate storm sewer systems throughout the County.²

¹ This was the second storm water permit adopted for Los Angeles County and its cities. The first permit was the subject of an earlier Order. (In the Matter of Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc., Order WQ 91-04). In this permit, the County is designated as the Principal Permittee, and each city is designated as a permittee. The County is required to submit various documents on behalf of all of the permittees.

² The Regional Water Board has since issued a separate permit for one city, Long Beach. The relevant provisions of the Long Beach permit are similar to those in Order No. 96-054.

The permit contains provisions for the regulation of storm water discharges from development planning and construction.³ Pursuant to these provisions, the County was required to submit Standard Urban Storm Water Mitigation Plans (SUSMPs).⁴ The SUSMPs are plans that designate best management practices (BMPs) that must be used in specified categories of development projects. The County submitted SUSMPs, but the Regional Water Board approved the SUSMPs only after making revisions. The Executive Officer issued the revised SUSMPs on March 8, 2000.⁵

On February 25, 2000, the State Water Resources Control Board (State Water Board or Board) received a petition for review of the actions and failures to act regarding the SUSMPs from a number of cities, the Building Industry Association of Southern California and the Building Industry Legal Defense Foundation (jointly referred to as Cities). A second petition was received from the City of Arcadia. And a third petition was received from the Western States Petroleum Association (WSPA). On April 7, 2000, the petitioners filed amendments to their petitions, concerning the March 8, 2000 issuance of the SUSMPs. The Cities' amendment also revised the list of cities included in the petition. The Cities' petition now includes 32 cities. The petitions are legally and factually related, and have therefore been consolidated for purposes of review.⁶ The petitioners also requested a stay of the SUSMPs. This request was denied by letter, dated May 11, 2000.

³ Permit, Part 2.III. These provisions focus more on post-construction impacts of development than on discharges from construction activities.

⁴ Permit, Part 2.III.A.1.c.

⁵ These are referred to herein as the Final SUSMPs. The Final SUSMPs also apply to Long Beach, even though it is subject to a separate permit.

⁶ Cal. Code of Regs., tit. 23, section 2054.

On June 7 and 8, 2000, the Board held a hearing in Torrance. Several entities, including the petitioners, the Regional Water Board, and several environmental groups⁷, were designated parties. The evidence from that hearing has been included in the record before the Board. The record for comments on the petition was kept open until the end of the hearing. The parties were allowed to submit post-hearing briefs.⁸

I. BACKGROUND

In prior Orders⁹ this Board has explained the need for the municipal storm water programs and the emphasis on BMPs in lieu of numeric effluent limitations. The emphasis for preventing pollution from storm water discharges is still on the development and implementation of effective BMPs, but with the expectation that the level of effort will increase over time. In its Interim Permitting Approach¹⁰, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA) stated that first-round permits should include BMPs, and expanded or better-tailored BMPs in subsequent permits where necessary to attain water quality standards. Dischargers, consultants, and academic institutions in California and nationwide have conducted numerous studies on the effectiveness of BMPs and appropriate design standards. While many questions are still

⁷ The environmental groups are Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc., Santa Monica BayKeeper, and Heal the Bay.

⁸ There are several documents that were not timely received and, therefore, are not made a part of the record before the Board. The hearing notice specified that all evidence from parties must be received by May 31, 2000. The Regional Water Board submitted documents on June 6, 2000. The hearing notice specified that policy statements were due by the close of the hearing. Several comment letters were received June 12, 13, and 19, 2000. None of these submittals are a part of the record. The post-hearing briefs were subject to a 10-page limit. The environmental groups submitted objections to the post-hearing brief submitted by the Cities. First, the environmental groups challenge the length of the brief. All briefs were subject to a 10-page limit. The Cities submitted a 10-page brief, with a 22-page attachment showing extensive proposed revisions to the SUSMPs. This submittal violates the page limit, and only the brief is considered part of the record. Second, the environmental groups claim that an e-mail message referred to by the petitioners is subject to attorney-client privilege and should not have been used in this hearing. This e-mail message, from the Regional Water Board's counsel to one of its engineers, was placed in the Regional Water Board's administrative record and submitted to the State Water Board. Any privilege that may have attached to the message has been waived and no longer exists. Finally, the post-hearing brief from the City of Arcadia was received late and will not be considered. Documents submitted late for interim deadlines (such as the deadline for submitting responses to the petitions), have been included in the record.

⁹ See, especially Orders WQ 91-03 (In the Matter of Citizens for a Better Environment et al.) and WQ 91-04.

¹⁰ Interim Permitting Approach for Water Quality-Based Effluent Limitations in Storm Water Permits. (61 Federal Register 57425.)

outstanding, more is expected of municipal dischargers, and many are implementing more effective programs.

While storm water management plans are improving, our knowledge of the impacts is also growing. Urban runoff has been determined to be a significant contributor of impairment to waters throughout the state. In Los Angeles specifically, beach closures are sometimes associated with urban runoff. In adopting the SUSMPs, the Regional Water Board took note of the urgent need for preventing further pollution from urban runoff and storm water discharges.

It is important to emphasize the role of the SUSMPs within the totality of regulating storm water discharges, and the purpose of these particular control measures. The requirement to prepare SUSMPS was part of the development controls in the permit. In addition to development controls, the permit requires education, public outreach, programs to restrict illicit connections and discharges, and controls on public facilities. In the context of the entire effort required by the permit, the development controls can be seen as preventing the existing situation from becoming worse.

The Final SUSMPs include a list of mandatory BMPs for nine categories of development. There are provisions that are applicable to all categories and lists of BMPs for individual categories. Requirements applicable to all categories include provisions to limit erosion from new development and redevelopment, requirements to conserve natural areas, protection of slopes and channels, and storm drain stenciling. Examples of BMPs specific to categories of discharge include design of loading docks for commercial projects and design of fueling areas for retail gasoline outlets. In most respects, the Final SUSMPs were similar to those proposed by the County. The significant departures were the inclusion of a numeric design standard for structural or treatment control BMPs, and the inclusion of certain types of projects that were not

covered in the County's proposal. The design standard creates objective and measurable criteria for the amount of runoff that must be treated or infiltrated by BMPs.

The record indicates that the purpose of the development controls, including the SUSMPs, is not simply to prevent pollution associated with construction runoff. As the petitioners point out, construction discharges are already subject to this Board's Statewide Construction Permit. The development controls in the SUSMPs, on the other hand, focus on post-construction runoff. They are aimed at limiting not just the pollutants in runoff from the new development, but also the volume of runoff that enters the municipal storm sewer system. By limiting runoff from new development, the SUSMPs prevent increased impacts from urban runoff generally. There is adequate technical information in the record to show that by controlling the volume of runoff from new development, BMPs can be effective in reducing the discharge of pollutants in storm water runoff.

The Procedure for Adopting the SUSMPs

The permit requires a program for controls on Development Planning and Construction. It involved a number of submissions by the County in consultation with the Cities. The first step was submission of a checklist for determining priority projects and exempt projects. The checklist was due on January 30, 1998. A list of recommended BMPs for development projects was also due on that date. The SUSMPs were due within six months of approval of the BMP list, and were to incorporate BMPs for certain categories of development. Following approval of the SUSMPs, the cities and County were to implement development programs for priority projects, consistent with the BMP list and the SUSMPs.

The BMP list was not approved until April 22, 1999. Thereafter, the County submitted proposed SUSMPs on July 22, 1999. The Regional Water Board held a public workshop on

August 10, 1999. Following the workshop, the County submitted revisions to the SUSMPs on August 12, 1999. On August 16, 1999, the Regional water Board gave notice that it would discuss the SUSMPs in a public meeting on September 16, 1999. There was significant discussion at that meeting regarding the intent of the Executive Officer to approve the SUSMPs, but with revisions including a numeric design standard. At the conclusion of the meeting, the Regional Water Board members asked the Executive Officer to revise the SUSMPs and bring them back to another meeting. On December 7, 1999, the Executive Officer circulated revised SUSMPs for public review. This document incorporated a numeric design standard and made other revisions to the permittees' proposal. The Regional Water Board held a hearing on the SUSMPs on January 26, 2000. At that meeting, the Regional Water Board endorsed the SUSMPs revised by the Executive Officer, but directed him to make further changes. The Executive Officer issued the Final SUSMPs on March 8, 2000.

The Contents of the Final SUSMPs

The permit provides that the SUSMPs must incorporate the appropriate elements of the BMP list and, at a minimum, apply to seven development categories: 100-plus home subdivisions; 10-plus home subdivisions; 100,000-plus square foot commercial developments; automotive repair shops; retail gasoline outlets; restaurants; and hillside single-family dwellings.

The SUSMPs proposed by the County applied to these seven categories. Various BMPs applied to the different categories, and the SUSMPs contained narrative mitigation requirements for source control and treatment. The July proposals stated:

“The development must be designed so as to mitigate (infiltrate and/or treat) the site runoff generated from impervious directly connected areas that may contribute pollutants of concern to the storm water conveyance system.”

There were no numeric design criteria for mitigation. According to various participants, earlier County drafts had included design standards to mitigate flows from 0.6-inch storm events. But any numeric criteria had been removed from the version that was submitted.

In its revised SUSMPs, submitted on August 12, the County explained in its cover letter that the mitigation language did not mean that all runoff must be mitigated. Rather, the County's intent was to omit a numerical standard from the SUSMPs. The revised SUSMPs no longer referred to mitigation at all. Instead, the following language replaced the mitigation requirement:

“The development must be designed so as to minimize, to the maximum extent practicable (MEP), the introduction of pollutants of concern that may result in significant impacts, generated from site runoff of directly connected impervious areas (DCIA), to the storm water conveyance system as approved by the building official.”

The Final SUSMPs, as approved by the Executive Officer and the Regional Water Board, included several revisions from the County's submittal. The revision that is of greatest concern to the petitioners is the addition of Design Standards for Structural or Treatment Control BMPs.¹¹ The design standards require that developments subject to the SUSMPs shall be designed to mitigate storm water runoff (by treatment or infiltration) from one of the following:

- “1. The 85th percentile 24-hour runoff event determined as the maximized capture storm water volume for the area..., or
2. The volume of annual runoff based on unit basin storage water quality volume, to achieve 80 percent or more volume treatment..., or
3. The volume of runoff produced from a 0.75 inch storm event, prior to its discharge to a storm water conveyance system, or
4. The volume of runoff produced from a historical-record based reference 24-hour rainfall criterion for “treatment” (0.75 inch average for the Los Angeles County area) that achieves approximately the same reduction in pollutant loads achieved by the 85th percentile 24-hour runoff event.”

¹¹ The Final SUSMPs also include the narrative language quoted from the County's August 22, 1999 proposal.

The Final SUSMPs also applied to two additional categories of development: parking lots over 5,000 square feet or with 25 or more spaces and exposed to storm water, and to developments in environmentally-sensitive areas. Other revisions included application to all projects in the categories instead of discretionary projects only and the definition of redevelopment.

II. CONTENTIONS AND FINDINGS¹²

Contention: The petitioners contend that the Regional Water Board erred in not complying with the Administrative Review Process within the permit, and acted arbitrarily and capriciously and in violation of the Clean Water Act and state law.

Finding: The permit required the County, in consultation with the cities subject to the permit, to submit SUSMPs. The permit includes some general minimum requirements for the SUSMPs.¹³ The Executive Officer is granted authority to approve the SUSMPs.¹⁴

The permit also contains an administrative review process.¹⁵ The permit states that the administrative review process “formalizes the procedure for review and acceptance of reports and documents” and “provides a method to resolve any differences in compliance expectations between the Regional Board and Permittees, prior to initiating enforcement action.”¹⁶ Following this introductory statement, the permit includes two procedures. The first is for review and approval or disapproval of reports and documents. The second is the dispute resolution section that must be followed prior to enforcement action.

¹² This Order does not address all of the issues raised by the petitioners. The Board finds that the issues that are not addressed are insubstantial and not appropriate for State Water Board review. (See *People v. Barry* (1987) 194 Cal.App.3d 158, [239 Cal.Rptr. 349], Cal. Code Regs., tit. 3, § 052.)

¹³ Permit, Part 2, III.A.1.c.

¹⁴ Permit, Part 2, III.A.2.

¹⁵ Permit, Part 2, I.G.

¹⁶ *Id.*

The process for review of documents that are subject to the Executive Officer's approval is that the Executive Officer will notify the permittees of the results of the review and approval or disapproval within 120 days. If the Executive Officer does not do so, the permittees must notify the Regional Water Board of their intent to implement the documents without approval. The Executive Officer then has 10 days to respond, or the permittees may implement the program and the Executive Officer may not make modifications.

The dispute resolution procedure is to be used when the Executive Officer determines that a permittee's storm water program is insufficient to meet the permit's provisions. The Executive Officer must send a "Notice of Intent to Meet and Confer" with the permittee. A meet and confer period then ensues, resulting in a written "Storm Water Program Compliance Amendment (SWPCA)." The permittee is provided time to comply with the SWPCA. The Executive Officer is not allowed to take enforcement action against a permittee until the Executive Officer notifies the permittee in writing that the administrative review process has been exhausted and that a violation exists warranting enforcement.

The petitioners contend that the Executive Officer failed to notify the permittees that their SUSMPs were inadequate within 120 days of its submittal. The petitioners also argue that, by revising the SUSMPs without pursuing the dispute resolution process, the Regional Water Board "violated" the terms of the permit.

The provision for review of documents, which clearly includes the SUSMPs, requires that the Executive Officer notify the permittees of the results of the review and approval or disapproval within 120 days. The County submitted the revised SUSMPs on August 12, 1999. Within 120 days, the Regional Water Board held a workshop where staff expressed their concerns with the SUSMPs. Also within 120 days the Regional Water Board itself held a public

meeting where there was extensive discussion and concern by board members that the SUSMPs did not include a numeric standard. And, prior to any notification by the permittees that they would proceed with implementing their SUSMPs, the Regional Water Board held a hearing January 26, 2000, where it directed the Executive Officer to issue the SUSMPs with revisions. The Executive Officer did so on March 8, 2000.

It is clear from the record that the Executive Officer, and the Regional Water Board itself, did inform the permittees that the SUSMPs were inadequate. There was no requirement for a specific form for expressing disapproval of documents. The extensive discussion and meetings on the need for revisions to the SUSMPs, and the Executive Officer's approval of revised SUSMPs, plainly refutes the allegation that the Regional Water Board never notified the permittees of its disapproval of the County's proposed SUSMPs.

The permittees also claim that the Regional Water Board "violated" the permit by failing to institute the meet and confer process.¹⁷ The dispute resolution process, which includes meet and confer, did not apply to the decision to disapprove the proposed SUSMPs. That process is only required when the Regional Water Board ultimately takes an enforcement action against a permittee. It is separate from the process for review and approval or disapproval of documents, and does not even appear to relate to possible enforcement actions for submission of inadequate documents. This is illustrated by the fact that the provision regarding documents refers to submittals from both the Principal Permittee and the individual permittees, while the dispute resolution provision refers only to the permittees. This distinction is relevant because the County is charged with submitting the documents, while the individual permittees are responsible for compliance. A fair reading of the entire section on the administrative review process is that the

¹⁷ We note that permits are issued to permittees to allow discharges to waters of the state. It is only permittees, and not Regional Water Boards, who can be charged with violating permits.

review and approval or disapproval of documents applies to submission of documents by the County on behalf of the cities, while the dispute resolution process applies to enforcement actions against any permittees for failing to implement adequate programs.

Contention: The petitioners contend that the Regional Water Board was not authorized to revise the SUSMPs to add more stringent requirements.

Finding: The petitioners contend that the mitigation standards in the SUSMPs are more stringent than the requirement in the permit to reduce pollutants in storm water runoff to the maximum extent practicable (MEP)¹⁸. The issue of what level of protection constitutes MEP will be discussed *Infra*, in the discussion of the reasonableness of the numeric standards. But the petitioners also make certain procedural claims on this point. They argue that in approving the BMP list, the Regional Water Board determined that those BMPs constituted MEP and that the Board could not add additional BMPs in the SUSMPs. They also contend the Regional Water Board itself had no authority to “usurp” the Executive Officer’s role in reviewing the SUSMPs.¹⁹ Finally, the petitioners contend that the Regional Water Board was not authorized to mandate a program for the permittees without amending the permit.

The permit requires the County to submit a list of BMPs for approval. The Regional Water Board approved this list. Following approval of the list, the County was required to submit the SUSMPs, which must “incorporate the appropriate elements of the recommended BMPs list.”²⁰ The petitioners contend that by approving the list, the Regional Water Board determined that those BMPs constituted MEP, and that under the terms of the permit the Regional Water Board could not require additional BMPs.

¹⁸ The technology-based standard for controls under municipal storm water permits is MEP. For a fuller discussion of this standard, see Order WQ 91-03.

¹⁹ It is undisputed that, at its January 26, 2000 meeting, the Board directed the Executive Officer to make additional revisions to the SUSMPs.

²⁰ Permit, Part 2, III.A.1.c.

In addressing this contention, we face what appears to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the numeric design standards on the part of the petitioners. The design standards are objective criteria that developers must achieve in designing their BMPs. The design standards are not separate BMPs. The standards tell what magnitude of storm event the BMPs must be designed to treat or infiltrate. They do not specify the BMPs that must be employed.

The SUSMPs as submitted by the County specify BMPs for various categories of development. Many of these BMPs are designed to minimize the pollutants in storm water runoff, by reducing flow through infiltration or by treatment. Examples of BMPs proposed by the County include infiltration basins and trenches, oil/water separators, and media filtration. The County's proposed SUSMPs also included language requiring minimizing the introduction of pollutants to the storm water conveyance system. That language remains unchanged in the Final SUSMPs. The only significant difference between the two versions of the SUSMPs was that the Regional Water Board established numeric criteria for designing the BMPs.

In adopting the Final SUSMPs, the Regional Water Board based its decision on the MEP standard.²¹ The Regional Water Board did not significantly revise the BMP list or specify further the actions that developers must take to comply with the SUSMPs. Thus, we find that the Regional Water Board did not inappropriately revise its determination of what constituted MEP.

The Regional Water Board is the political body responsible for water quality control in the Los Angeles region.²² While the Regional Water Board may delegate specified powers and duties to its Executive Officer,²³ it can at any time act on its own behalf. The fact that the Board authorized its Executive Officer to approve the SUSMPs in the permit did not mean that the Board thereby denied itself the opportunity to provide direction to the Executive Officer in his

²¹ Resolution R-00-02.

²² Water Code sections 13200 and 13225.

²³ Water Code section 13223.

approval. Such an interpretation of its delegation authority would result in an improper failure of the Board to assume responsibility for water quality in the region.

We also find that the Regional Water Board was authorized to revise the SUSMPs to achieve compliance with the permit's requirements. The SUSMPs are a part of implementation of the permit. Because the permit regulates storm water discharges throughout the entire Los Angeles region and it is implemented by 85 cities and the County, it is obvious that the permit could not spell out every detail of the program for the five-year term of the permit. Instead, the implementation is through the submission, review and approval, and implementation of various programs, including the SUSMPs.²⁴ Where it receives a submission that it finds is not consistent with the requirements of the permit, it is reasonable for the Regional Water Board to be able to require revisions. The Regional Water Board is not required to amend the permit each time it approves a submittal or approves a submittal with revisions. On the other hand, if the Regional Water Board's action in requiring revisions is inconsistent with the terms of the permit, then the Board should not act without first amending the permit. While the Regional Water Board could have required the County to make the revisions rather than making them itself, we see no harm in the Regional Water Board's approach.

As will be discussed below, in most respects the Final SUSMPs are consistent with the permit. But there are some portions of the SUSMPs that are not consistent, and in those cases the SUSMPs provisions are further revised in this Order.

Contention: The petitioners make various procedural claims, including that they were denied due process, and that the Regional Water Board violated the Administrative Procedure

²⁴ A fuller discussion of the use of storm water management plans to incorporate a developing program is found in Order No. WQ 91-03.

Act, the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA), and the California Constitution, Article XIII B, section 6 (regarding state mandates).

Finding: The petitioners point out that at the January 26, 2000 Regional Water Board hearing, there was some confusion over late changes to the SUSMPs and they contend they were not provided adequate opportunity to comment. There was significant discussion of the SUSMPs over several months. We do not agree with the petitioners that a program of this magnitude must necessarily take years to develop. But we are concerned that at the January 26, 2000 hearing, interested persons and permittees were not given adequate time to review late revisions or to comment on them. Given the intense interest in this issue, the Regional Water Board should have diverged from its strict rule limiting individual speakers to three minutes and conducted a more formal process. Such a process should provide adequate time for comment, including continuances where appropriate.²⁵ But to the extent the Regional Water Board's process caused any harm, this Board cured those harms. We held a two-day hearing in Los Angeles County, where all parties were allowed significant time to present their positions and testimony. In addition, we allowed the introduction of new evidence that had not been presented to the Regional Water Board. At this point, all parties have been afforded a full opportunity to review the Final SUSMPs, to present their positions and evidence, and to engage in cross-examination. The petitioners' due process rights have been protected.

The Board has already addressed the contentions regarding compliance with other laws in prior decisions. The Administrative Procedure Act exempts the adoption of permits from its requirements.²⁶ While the SUSMPs are not a permit, they are implementing documents for a

²⁵ For future adjudicative proceedings that are highly controversial or involve complex factual or legal issues, we encourage regional water boards to follow the procedures for formal hearings set forth in Cal. Code of Regs., tit. 23, section 648 et seq.

²⁶ Government Code section 11352; See, Order No. 95-4 (In the Matter of the City and County of San Francisco).

permit, and are therefore subject to the exemption. Moreover, they are relevant only to this permit, and are not a general rule of application. The constitutional provisions regarding state mandates also do not apply to NPDES permits.²⁷ As will be explained below, the SUSMPs as revised herein, are consistent with MEP and therefore are federally mandated. The provisions of CEQA requiring adoption of environmental documents also do not apply to NPDES permits.²⁸ Again, as an implementing document for the permit, there is no requirement for a separate CEQA analysis.²⁹

Contention: The petitioners contend that the SUSMPs do not properly apply the maximum extent practicable standard.

Finding: The permit, consistent with Clean Water Act section 402(p)(3)(B)(iii), requires controls to reduce the discharge of pollutants to the maximum extent practicable, or MEP.³⁰ In approving the Final SUSMPs, the Regional Water Board acknowledged that one of the primary objectives of the municipal storm water program is the requirement to reduce the discharge of pollutants from storm water conveyance systems to the MEP.³¹ While all parties appear to agree that the standard for the SUSMPs is MEP, they disagree about what level of effort is necessary to comply with that standard.

The petitioners approach this issue from two angles. First, they contend that the SUSMPs will not provide water quality benefits that reflect MEP. Second, they contend that there could be adverse impacts on groundwater quality that have not been adequately evaluated.

²⁷ See, Order No. WQ 90-3 (In the Matter of San Diego Unified Port District).

²⁸ Water Code section 13389.

²⁹ We do note with interest the environmental groups' comment that if the permittees believed it was necessary to comply with the APA and CEQA prior to adoption of the SUSMPs, then they themselves would have violated those acts in their submissions of the proposed SUSMPs.

³⁰ Permit, Finding 13.

³¹ Final SUSMPs, at page 2; Resolution No. R-00-02, at page 3.

Storm Water Design Standards as MEP

In adopting the Final SUSMPs, the Regional Water Board found that many rivers and streams in Los Angeles County are impaired for pollutants found in storm water and urban runoff, and that storm water runoff carries pollutants from nearly all types of developed properties.³² Pollutant loading from the aggregate of development in the basin results in impairments from sediments, metals, complex organic compounds, oil and grease, nutrients, and pesticides.³³ The Final SUSMPs reflect two goals: to reduce the amounts of these pollutants in runoff and to reduce the ability of runoff to act as a conveyance system to deliver more pollutants to receiving waters. The Final SUSMPs, which include lists of BMPs and design standards requiring treatment or infiltration, address these two goals.

Clean Water Act section 402(p)(3)(B)(iii), which sets forth the requirements for establishing MEP in municipal storm water permits, provides that such permits “shall require controls to reduce the discharge of pollutants to the maximum extent practicable, including management practices, control techniques and system, design and engineering methods, and such other provisions as the Administrator or the State determines appropriate for the control of such pollutants.” The United States Environmental Protection Agency (U.S. EPA), in a guidance document, explains that BMPs should be used in first-round storm water permits, and “expanded or better-tailored BMPs in subsequent permits, where necessary, to provide for the attainment of water quality standards.”³⁴ The Clean Water Act, as interpreted by U.S. EPA, does require that, in a second-round permit,³⁵ expanded BMPs may be appropriate. In light of the number of water

³² Resolution No. R-00-02.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ Interim Permitting Approach for Water Quality-Based Effluent Limitations in Storm Water Permits, 61 Federal Register 57425 (1996).

³⁵ The original permit was issued in 1990. The 1996 permit is a second-round permit.

bodies impaired by runoff in Los Angeles County, it was appropriate to expand the scope of BMPs during the permit term.

The regulations implementing section 402(p) specifically require municipalities to have controls to reduce the discharge of pollutants from their storm sewer systems that “receive discharges from areas of new development and significant redevelopment,” including post-construction discharges.³⁶ Clearly, it was appropriate for the Regional Water Board to require BMPs for new development and significant redevelopment. The permittees, who submitted their own version of SUSMPs with listed BMPs for categories of development, appear to have no real quarrel with this general mandate.

This Board has already endorsed requirements to limit the flow of the “first flush” of storm water, which may contain more significant pollutants.³⁷ The permittees’ own version of the SUSMPs required mitigation of storm water runoff by treatment or infiltration, thus conceding the propriety of these two approaches to lessening the impact of storm water discharges. The crux of the disagreement is that the Regional Water Board added numeric design standards to establish the amount of runoff that must be treated or infiltrated, and required the mandatory application of these standards to categories of development.

The addition of measurable standards for designing the BMPs provides additional guidance to developers and establishes a clear target for the development of the BMPs. The U.S. EPA guidance manual suggests the use of design criteria and performance standards for post-construction BMPs.³⁸ The numeric criteria the Regional Water Board adopted essentially

³⁶ 40 CFR section 122.26(d)(2)(iv)(A)(2).

³⁷ In the Matter of National Steel and Shipbuilding Company, et al., Order WQ 98-07, at slip opinion 7.

³⁸ Guidance Manual for the Preparation of Part 2 of the NPDES Permit Applications for Discharges from Municipal Separate Storm Sewer Systems, at page 6-4 (November 1992).

requires that 85 percent of the runoff from the development be infiltrated or treated.³⁹ In adopting these standards, the Regional Water Board based its decision on a research review of standards in other states and a statistical analysis of the rainfall in the area. The standard was set to gain the maximum benefit in mitigation while imposing the least burden on developers.⁴⁰ In light of the evidence of the use of this or more stringent standards in other states, the expert testimony supporting this standard, the endorsement by U.S. EPA in its comments, and the cost-effectiveness of its implementation (discussed below), the Regional Water Board acted appropriately in determining that the standards reflect MEP.⁴¹

We also find that the Regional Water Board appropriately applied these standards to seven of the categories listed in the SUSMPs: single-family hillside residences, 100,000 square foot commercial developments, automotive repair shops, restaurants, home subdivisions with 10 to 99 housing units, home subdivisions with 100 or more housing units, and parking lots with 5,000 square feet or more or with 25 or more parking spaces and potentially exposed to storm water runoff.⁴² These categories, except for parking lots, were already targeted for special treatment in the permit. The evidence shows that each listed category can be a significant source of pollutants and/or runoff following development. It is appropriate that the design standards apply so that BMPs for these categories of development result in the infiltration or treatment of a significant amount of the runoff.

³⁹ Four different methods of calculation are permitted, so the percentage of capture may vary slightly.

⁴⁰ At the hearing in this matter, Regional Water Board staff explained that the standard was set at the bottom of the “knee” of the curve where the benefits of the mitigation requirements decrease and the cost increases. Other states have set the standard higher along this curve, requiring 90 to 95 percent mitigation.

⁴¹ This conclusion in no way departs from our acceptance of BMPs in lieu of numeric effluent limitations in storm water permits. (See, e.g., Order WQ 91-03 and Order WQ 91-04.) The numeric standard is a design standard for BMPs. It does not quantify or limit the pollutants in the effluent. It also does not specify which of the listed BMPs must be employed.

⁴² As discussed below, this Board is revising the SUSMPs to delete the application of the design standards to retail gasoline outlets and to locations within or directly adjacent to or discharging directly to environmentally-sensitive areas.

Potential Impacts on Ground Water

The petitioners contend that infiltration of runoff may lead to ground water pollution, and that the Regional Water Board did not properly consider such potential impacts. The mitigation standards provide for a waiver where there is a risk of ground water contamination because a known unconfined aquifer lies beneath the land surface or an existing or potential underground source of drinking water is less than ten feet from the soil surface.⁴³ The Final SUSMPs also include a discussion on how to use infiltration so that the risk of contamination of groundwater is reduced, and where infiltration is not appropriate.⁴⁴

The Regional Water Board did consider the potential impacts to groundwater from infiltration, and included appropriate limitations and guidance on its use as a BMP. These provisions will ensure adequate protection of groundwater from any adverse impacts due to infiltration.

Contention: The petitioners contend the Regional Water Board failed to show that the SUSMPs as adopted are cost-effective and that the benefits to be obtained outweigh the costs.

Finding: The petitioners refer to the Preamble to the Phase II storm water regulations⁴⁵ as the basis for their economic argument. The quoted language, however, does not wholly support the petitioners' contention. The Preamble states that President Clinton's Clean Water Initiative clarifies "that the maximum extent practicable standard should be applied in a site-specific, flexible manner, taking into account cost considerations as well as water quality effects."⁴⁶ It is clear that cost should be considered in determining MEP; this does not mean that

⁴³ Final SUSMP, page 14.

⁴⁴ *Id.*, at page 15.

⁴⁵ 64 Federal Register 68722 and following. These regulations do not apply to the permit, but the general language on MEP is relevant to EPA's interpretation of the standard.

⁴⁶ 64 Federal Register 68722, 68732 (December 8, 1999).

the Regional Water Board must demonstrate that the water quality benefits outweigh the economic costs.

While the standard of MEP is not defined in the storm water regulations or the Clean Water Act, the term has been defined in other federal rules. Probably the most comparable law that uses the term is the Superfund legislation, or CERCLA, at section 121(b). The legislative history of CERCLA indicates that the relevant factors, to determine whether MEP is met in choosing solutions and treatment technologies, include technical feasibility, cost, and state and public acceptance.⁴⁷ Another example of a definition of MEP is found in a regulation adopted by the Department of Transportation for onshore oil pipelines. MEP is defined as to “the limits of available technology and the practical and technical limits on a pipeline operator”⁴⁸

These definitions focus mostly on technical feasibility, but cost is also a relevant factor. There must be a serious attempt to comply, and practical solutions may not be lightly rejected. If, from the list of BMPs, a permittee chooses only a few of the least expensive methods, it is likely that MEP has not been met. On the other hand, if a permittee employs all applicable BMPs except those where it can show that they are not technically feasible in the locality, or whose cost would exceed any benefit to be derived, it would have met the standard. MEP requires permittees to choose effective BMPs, and to reject applicable BMPs only where other effective BMPs will serve the same purpose, the BMPs would not be technically feasible, or the cost would be prohibitive. Thus while cost is a factor, the Regional Water Board is not required to perform a cost-benefit analysis.

In reviewing the record, it is apparent that the Regional Water Board did evaluate the cost of the SUSMPs. While the petitioners claim there is no evidence in the record to show the

⁴⁷ 132 Cong. Rec. H 9561 (Oct. 8, 1986).

⁴⁸ 49 CFR section 194.5.

SUSMPs are necessary and cost effective, the opposite is true. The record is replete with documentation of costs of pilot mitigation projects, studies from similar programs in other states, and research studies. The Regional Water Board complied with the requirement to consider cost.

The Regional Water Board found that the cost to include BMPs that will meet the mitigation criteria will be one to two percent of the total development cost. This amount appears reasonable, especially in light of the amount of impervious surface already in Los Angeles County and the impacts on impaired water bodies. In considering the cost of compliance, it is also important to consider the costs of impairment. The beach closures in the Los Angeles region, well documented in the evidence, have reached critical proportions. These beach closures clearly have a financial impact on the area, and should be positively affected by the SUSMPs.

We do note that there could be further cost savings for developers if the permittees develop a regional solution for the problem. We recommend that the cities and the County, along with other interested agencies, work to develop regional solutions so that individual dischargers are not forced to create numerous small-scale projects. While the SUSMPs are an appropriate means of requiring mitigation of storm water discharges, we also encourage innovative regional approaches.⁴⁹

Contention: The petitioners have raised contentions regarding details of the SUSMPs, including the amount of time allowed for inclusion of SUSMPs in local ordinances, and their application to both “discretionary” and “non-discretionary” projects. In addition, during the hearing certain ambiguities in the wording of the Final SUSMPs became apparent, including the provisions regarding redevelopment and environmentally-sensitive areas. In this portion of the

⁴⁹ We note that the SUSMPs as written do not in any way preclude the development of regional solutions approved by the Regional Water Board as a means to comply with the BMP and design standard requirements.

Order we address these issues and also the application of the design standards to retail gasoline outlets (RGOs) and the waiver funding requirements.

Finding: The testimony at the hearing in this matter revealed that there are specific provisions of the SUSMPs that create confusion as to the types of development projects subject to the mitigation design standards. The petitioners also contend that application of the standards to specific types of development either is unreasonable or is inconsistent with the terms of the permit. The specific requirements are discussed below.

Retail Gasoline Outlets

Petitioner WSPA contends that RGOs should be excluded from the SUSMPs. Its petition raised the same general contentions as the other petitioners, but at the hearing WSPA presented evidence specific to RGOs. In particular, WSPA raised questions about the propriety of applying the design standards for BMPs to RGOs. In considering this issue, we conclude that construction of RGOs is already heavily regulated and that owners may be limited in their ability to construct infiltration facilities. Moreover, in light of the small size of many RGOs and the proximity to underground tanks, treatment may not always be feasible, or safe. The mandatory BMPs that are included in the SUSMPs may be adequate to achieve MEP at RGOs, but the Regional Water Board should add additional mandatory BMPs, such as use of dry cleanup methods (e.g. sweeping) for removal of litter and debris, use of rags and absorbents for leaks and spills, restricting the practice of washing down hard surfaces unless the wash water is collected and disposed of properly, annual training of employees on proper spill cleanup and waste disposal methods, and the inclusion of BMPs to address trash receptacle areas and air/water supply

areas.⁵⁰ We conclude that because RGOs are already heavily regulated and may be limited in their ability to construct infiltration facilities or to perform treatment, they should not be subject to the BMP design standards at this time, and recommend that the Regional Water Board undertake further consideration of a threshold relative to size of the RGO, number of fueling nozzles, or some other relevant factor. This Order should not be construed to preclude inclusion of RGOs in the SUSMP design standards, with proper justification, when the permit is reissued.

Redevelopment Projects

The SUSMPs were written to apply to new development and to some types of redevelopment in nine categories of projects. The definition of “redevelopment” reflected the intent of the Regional Water Board to define the scope of redevelopment projects subject to the requirements. That definition⁵¹, however, was somewhat confusing, and it was apparent from testimony at the hearing that the parties had different understandings of the scope of redevelopment subject to the SUSMPs. In their post-hearing briefs, the various parties appeared to agree on the actual intent of the Regional Water Board in including redevelopment in the SUSMPs. This intent was to include redevelopment that adds or creates at least 5,000 square feet of impervious surface to the original development and, where the addition constitutes less than 50 percent of the original development, to limit the application of the BMP design standards to the addition.

⁵⁰ These BMPs are from a list of BMPs in a publication of the California Storm Water Quality Task Force. (Best Management Practice Guide – Retail Gasoline Outlets, March 1997.) This publication includes BMPs in addition to those listed in the SUSMPs. All BMPs recommended in this publication should be mandated.

⁵¹ The SUSMPs state: “Redevelopment” means, on an already developed site, the creation or addition of at least 5,000 square feet of impervious surfaces or the creation or addition of fifty percent or more of impervious surfaces or the making of improvements to fifty percent or more of the existing structure. Redevelopment includes, but is not limited to: the expansion of a building footprint or addition or replacement of a structure; structural development including an increase in gross floor area and/or exterior construction or remodeling; replacement of impervious surface that is not part of a routine maintenance activity; and land disturbing activities related with structural or impervious surfaces.

While some parties requested further requirements for development, it appears that the Regional Water Board's original intent was relatively simple to apply and results in a fair and appropriate application of the SUSMPs' requirements to redevelopment. Therefore, we will revise the definition in the SUSMPs accordingly.

Environmentally-Sensitive Areas

The permit required that the SUSMPs address at least seven development categories.⁵² The final SUSMPs added two more categories: parking lots of 5,000 square feet or more or with 25 or more parking spaces and potentially exposed to storm water runoff; and location within or directly adjacent to an environmentally-sensitive area (ESA). The petitioners contend that the addition of ESAs was inappropriate because the permit refers only to "development categories"⁵³ and ESA is a location category.

Whether or not the Regional Water Board went beyond the permit's terms in including this category, we find a fundamental problem with the language of the SUSMPs regarding ESAs. All of the other categories are relatively simple to apply because they describe the types of development that fall within the category. For instance, the threshold for a commercial development is 100,000 square feet. If the development is smaller, it is not subject to the SUSMPs. But for developments within ESAs, the SUSMPs contain no threshold. This absence led to speculation by the petitioners that something as small as a new patio on a home in an ESA would make the SUSMPs applicable. The Regional Water Board, at the hearing and in its post-hearing brief, conceded that there should be some threshold. While the Regional Water Board

⁵² The categories listed in the permit are: single-family hill residences, 100,000 square-foot commercial developments, automotive repair shops, retail gasoline outlets, restaurants, home subdivisions with 10 to 99 housing units, and home subdivisions with 100 or more housing units. Permit, Part 2, III.A.1.c.

⁵³ *Id.*

did recommend a specific threshold, we believe that it is inappropriate for this Board to add a threshold that has not been fully discussed by all interested persons.

While it may be appropriate to include more stringent controls for developments in ESAs, we also note that such developments are already subject to extensive regulation under other regulatory programs. Moreover, in light of the permit language limiting the SUSMPs to development categories, ESAs are not an appropriate category within the SUSMPs. The Regional Water Board may choose to consider the issue further when it reissues the permit.

Discretionary and Non-Discretionary, or Ministerial, Projects

The petitioners contend that the SUSMPs should apply only to projects that are considered “discretionary” within the meaning of California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA).⁵⁴ They argue that the inclusion of non-discretionary, or ministerial, projects is inconsistent with the terms of the permit.

The permit provisions on development projects do refer to “discretionary” projects in several places. The permittees are directed to develop a checklist for determining priority and exempt projects.⁵⁵ Priority projects are defined as development and redevelopment projects requiring discretionary approval, which may have a potential significant effect on storm water quality.⁵⁶ The permittees are also required to develop a BMP list.⁵⁷ In developing the SUSMPs, the permittees are required to incorporate appropriate elements of the BMP list.⁵⁸ Next, the permittees must develop a program on planning control measures for priority projects (which are limited to projects requiring discretionary approval), consistent with the list of BMPs and the

⁵⁴ Public Resources Code section 21000 *et seq.*

⁵⁵ Permit, Part 2, III.A.1.a.

⁵⁶ *Id.*

⁵⁷ Permit, Part 2, III.A.1.b.

⁵⁸ Permit, Part 2, III.A.1.c.

SUSMPs.⁵⁹ The permit further states that, in order to assure compliance with these requirements, the permittees must develop guidelines on preparing CEQA documents that link mitigation conditions to “local discretionary project approvals.”⁶⁰

Taken as a whole, the provisions of the permit appear to link the development requirements for SUSMPs to developments that receive discretionary approval by local governments, as defined in CEQA. The SUSMPs are an implementation tool for the permit and must be consistent with the permit. While the limitation of the SUSMPs to discretionary projects may not be sufficiently broad for an effective storm water control program, the Regional Water Board acted inappropriately in expanding the SUSMPs to include non-discretionary projects. The Regional Water Board may consider expanding the development controls beyond CEQA discretionary projects when it reissues the permit. But at this time, the SUSMPs must be revised so that they are limited to development projects requiring discretionary approval within the meaning of CEQA.⁶¹

Waiver Funding Requirement

Where a waiver is granted from the design standard requirements, the Final SUSMPs provide that the permittee must require the project proponent to transfer the cost savings to a storm water mitigation fund. The fund is to be operated by a public agency or a non-profit entity, to promote regional or alternative solutions for storm water pollution in the same storm watershed. The petitioners contend that the funding requirement will create an additional administrative burden.

⁵⁹ Permit, Part 2, III.a.2.

⁶⁰ Permit, Part 2, III.a.3.b.

⁶¹ We note that the Final SUSMPs already include a definition of “discretionary project” consistent with the definition in the CEQA guidelines. Final SUSMPs at page 4 of 25; Title 14, California Code of Regulations, section 15357. Apparently this definition was inadvertently retained after the Regional Water Board decided to expand the SUSMPs beyond discretionary projects.

The concept of a mitigation fund or “bank” is a positive idea for obtaining regional solutions to storm water runoff. As a long-term strategy, municipal storm water dischargers should work to establish regional mitigation facilities, which may be more cost-effective and more technically effective than mitigation structures at individual developments. But at this point there are not sufficient resources in place to require all permittees to establish such funds or to find appropriate non-profit organizations. Before mandating funding, preliminary questions should be answered, including who will manage the fund, what types of projects it will be used for, what entities can legally operate such funds, and how permittees will determine the amount of the assessments. It would be appropriate for the County to consider developing a program with the appropriate flood control agency, or as a model for the separate cities to develop. There may be suitable agencies to administer such funds, but the development of programs may take some time. The Regional Water Board should consider adopting such a program when it reissues the permit, after consultation with the appropriate local agencies.

III. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the discussion above, the Board concludes that:

1. The Regional Water Board complied with the procedural requirements of the permit, including the Administrative Review Process, in approving the Final SUSMPs.
2. The Regional Water Board was authorized to revise the SUSMPs by including more stringent requirements than the permittees had proposed.
3. The Regional Water Board complied with did not violate the Administrative Procedure Act, CEQA, or the Constitutional provisions on state mandates. The petitioners’ due process rights have been protected
4. The Regional Water Board considered the costs of the SUSMPs, and acted reasonably in requiring these controls in light of the expected benefits to water quality.

5. The Final SUSMPs reflect a reasonable interpretation of development controls that achieve reduction of pollutants in storm water discharges to the maximum extent practicable.
6. The SUSMPs include adequate protections of groundwater quality from any impacts from infiltration.
7. The SUSMPs will be revised to clarify the intent of the Regional Water Board and to make them consistent with the permit. Specifically, retail gasoline outlets should not be subject to the BMP design standards because they are already heavily regulated and may be limited in their ability to construct infiltration facilities or to perform treatment. Redevelopment projects should be subject to the SUSMPs only if they result in creation or addition of 5,000 square feet of impervious surfaces. Environmentally-sensitive areas should not be listed as a category in the SUSMPs. The SUSMPs should only apply to discretionary projects. The requirement for funding by project proponents who receive waivers should be deleted. The SUSMPs will be amended as shown in the attachment to this Order.
8. In light of the revisions of the SUSMPs made by this Order, and to allow the permittees adequate time to adopt implementing ordinances, the deadline for adopting ordinances will be revised to January 15, 2001, and the effective date of the Final SUSMPs will be revised to February 15, 2001.

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IV. ORDER

IT IS HEREBY ORDERED that the Standard Urban Storm Water Mitigation Plans for Los Angeles County and Cities in Los Angeles County is revised consistent with the amendments attached hereto. In all other respects the petitions are dismissed.

CERTIFICATION

The undersigned, Administrative Assistant to the Board, does hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true, and correct copy of an order duly and regularly adopted at a meeting of the State Water Resources Control Board held on October 5, 2000.

AYE: Arthur G. Baggett, Jr.
 Mary Jane Forster
 John W. Brown

NO: None

ABSENT: Peter S. Silva

ABSTAIN: None

/s/
Maureen Marché
Administrative Assistant to the Board

AMENDMENTS TO SUSMPS

[These amendments are to the Final SUSMP, as published March 8, 2000]

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First full paragraph:

All **discretionary development and redevelopment** projects that fall into one of ~~seven~~ **the following** categories are ~~identified in the Los Angeles County MS4 Permit as requiring subject to these~~ SUSMPs. These categories are:

- Single-family Hillside Residences
- 100,000 Square Foot Commercial Developments
- Automotive Repair Shops
- Retail Gasoline Outlets
- Restaurants
- Home Subdivisions with 10 to 99 housing units
- Home Subdivisions with 100 or more housing units
- **Parking lots 5,000 square feet or more or with 25 or more parking spaces and potentially exposed to storm water runoff**

Second full paragraph:

~~The Regional Board Executive Officer has designated two additional categories subject to SUSMP requirements for the Los Angeles County MS4 Permit. These categories are:~~

- ~~• Location within or directly adjacent to or discharging directly to an environmentally sensitive area, and~~
- ~~• Parking lots 5,000 square feet or more or with 25 or more parking spaces and potentially exposed to storm water runoff~~

Fourth full paragraph:

Permittees shall amend codes, if necessary, not later than ~~September 8, 2000~~ **January 15, 2001**, to give legal effect to the SUSMP requirements. The SUSMP requirements for projects identified herein shall take effect not later than ~~October 8, 2000~~ **February 15, 2001**.

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Delete definition of “Environmentally Sensitive Area”

Revise Definition of “Redevelopment”:

“Redevelopment” means, on an already developed site, the creation or addition of at least 5,000 square feet of impervious surfaces ~~or the creation or addition of fifty percent or more of impervious surfaces or the making of improvements to fifty percent or more of the existing structure.~~ Redevelopment includes, but is not limited to: the expansion of a building footprint or addition or replacement of a structure; structural development including an increase in gross floor area and/or exterior construction or remodeling; replacement of impervious surface that is not part of a routine maintenance activity; and land disturbing activities related with structural or impervious surfaces. **Where redevelopment results in an increase of less than fifty percent of the impervious surfaces of a previously existing development, and the existing development was not subject to these SUSMPs, the Design Standards apply only to the addition, and not to the entire development.**

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Add to “Limited Exclusion”: Retail Gasoline Outlets

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Delete the first full paragraph (storm water mitigation funding)