

Issue 3: Evaluation of Contact Water Recreation (REC-1) Water Quality Objectives and the Methods for Quantifying Exceedances

Type of Action:

Consideration of 2012 USEPA Recreational Water Quality Criteria

Category:

Reasonable and Protective

Staff Recommendation:

Track the progress of science that could lead to revised water quality standards and focus efforts on compliance prohibitions against discharges of fecal indicator bacteria.

Discussion:

The San Diego Water Board will evaluate available data, reports and any request for modification of water quality objectives for Contact Water Recreation (REC-1).

The goal of the project will be to determine whether and to what extent data supports amending the objectives, implementation provisions for applicable TMDLs, or the TMDLs themselves. This is a timely project because in 2012 the USEPA released revised guidance for recreational water criteria, and several local and/or regional studies are in progress that can inform the selection of pathogen indicators and objectives. Additionally, the Bacteria TMDL specifies that the San Diego Water Board will initiate a Basin Plan amendment project to revise the requirements and/or provisions for implementing the TMDLs by April 2016, provided sufficient data exist to support the initiation of a Basin Plan amendment.

Specifically, as part of this Triennial Review project and by November 2017, staff will (1) continue to participate on related technical, scientific, and regulatory advisory groups including processes established for the purposes of supporting this Triennial Review priority; (2) conduct a public workshop during the 2015-2016 fiscal year following community outreach on the state of applicable science, particularly in relation to selection of indicators and compliance with objectives in wet weather; and (3) continue to seek a third party cost benefit analysis regarding compliance with regulations of the San Diego Water Board, with a specific focus on the infeasibility of meeting wet weather TMDL water quality objectives for bacteria indicators.

This work will be evaluated with information from existing initiatives within the San Diego Water Board's storm water and sanitary sewer programs such as reviewing sanitary sewer collection system data for opportunities to mitigate the risk of spills as a source of pathogens in local waters; information provided by interested parties; and working with the MS4 Copermittees through the Water Quality Improvement Plans of the MS4 permit, to assist in evaluating options for achieving compliance with the interim milestones of the Bacteria TMDLs.

Following the evaluation, San Diego Water Board staff will make recommendations to the Board to meet the following objectives: (1) protecting beneficial uses; (2) adopting new and updating existing regulations based upon the latest technical findings and scientific understanding; (3) facilitating effective use of resources by regulated parties; and (4) ensuring judicious use of San Diego Water Board resources. Results of the evaluation may include Basin Plan amendments to water quality objectives or to the Bacteria TMDLs, or other regulatory actions by the Board.

Practical Vision:

This recommendation advances the Practical Vision plans to achieve healthy waters through collaboration, reliance on the latest science, prioritization of issues and actions, and prudent use of authorities in service to the people of California. By evaluating the existing water quality objectives, USEPA guidance, scientific studies, and stakeholder interests, the San Diego Water Board will be able to protect the contact recreational beneficial uses in the most efficient manner practicable.