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## Litter-free and Sound Drains

By *Sophie Braccini*

"Litter travels, but it can stop with you," is the new advertising campaign of the Contra Costa Clean Water Program. Whether they like it or not, Lamorinda's local governments will participate because the San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Control Board has added a trash reduction objective to their storm water permits. Our cities say they are ready to face that challenge.

"The new Municipal Regional Permit calls for a significant reduction in trash entering our waterways," says Jill Mercurio, Moraga's Director of Public Works, "the first target is a 40% reduction by 2014, 70% reduction by 2017, and 100% reduction by 2022." Mercurio reports that at a meeting of Contra Costa agencies on October 21st, public works decision makers spent a lot of time discussing how they would tackle this challenge, since each municipality will be responsible for implementing its own measures and monitoring their effectiveness.

"This is a new program for us," confirms Orinda's Director of Public Works, Charles Swanson, "we first need to study what we collect, then decide where we will place our collection points, establish a budget, and finally decide how the cleaning will be done."

The first step is to assess the amount of trash-making. The three municipalities will determine "hot spots," which will serve as focal points to study the nature of our trash. "We will look at the creek sites in Lafayette and identify the best place for monitoring," says Donna Feehan, Lafayette Public Works Administrative Analyst.

The next step will be the installation of collectors in one or more locations. "The good news is that the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) has received funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act for the first round of trash-capture installations. Each municipality will receive its proportion of the grant," adds Mercurio, "Moraga is likely to receive between \$15,000 and \$25,000."

None of the three cities believes it has a serious trash problem, despite assertions by environmentalists that millions of pounds of trash end up floating in the Bay Area's waterways each year. "My Street Maintenance Worker says that the majority of the litter he sees in the storm drains consists of packing peanuts, soda cans, and tennis balls. But Moraga does not have a huge trash problem," states Mercurio. Her concerns, in preparation for the rainy season, are more around getting the cleanup done and checking the state of the pipes.

The same concerns are heard in Orinda. "Some of the pipes are probably sixty years old," explains Swanson, "two years ago we assessed their state by filming in the pipes. The problem is comparable to our roads and we have a plan to catch up on maintenance."

Mercurio had a similar study done. "We are looking at the end of the 'useful life' for many of the pipes that were installed prior to incorporation of the Town," she says, noting that, "the video analysis that was made indicates a few areas that need some work, but nothing unexpected or that we cannot handle through our maintenance efforts."

Lafayette's Feehan says, "We check our drains when needed with the use of cameras, and we do the repairs as the needs arise." All three Public Works departments would like to remind residents that cleaning the waterways in and around their properties is their responsibility. "Residents need to clean up their creeks and pay attention to culverts under the driveway so they don't plug up," says Swanson. "They should also check trees for potential hazards and for any broken or dead branches before forecasted storms and rain," adds Feehan.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced the arrival of El Niño in July, indicating a potential risk of severe winter storms in California. "If residents notice storm damage blocking the roads, please call the Public Works Department during work hours, or police after hours," recommends Mercurio. Public Work Departments: Lafayette, 299-3259 Moraga, 888-7026 Orinda, 253-4231

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

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