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Discharge event grays San Pedro Creek; affects Steelhead

By Lynn Adams | Special to the Pacifica Tribune

POSTED: 05/21/2013 05:06:28 PM PDT |

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A "gray" San Pedro Creek was reported on Thursday, May 16, "as if someone had cleaned out their Cement Mixer and dumped the resulting grey water in the creek," one observer said. Discovered approximately 1:30 p.m., the witness reports that he "drove to the back of Linda Mar on Rosita Road and stopped at various bridges to look at the creek. The pollution seemed to go all the way to the back of the residential area, however it appeared to be clear coming out of the (San Pedro County) park." Photos taken approximately 4:30 p.m. show a still murky creek with continued evidence of some sort of dumping.

One creek steward shared, "It sounds like someone cleaned up their stucco or cement at the street gutter and it all runs into the creek. I think we need to educate people and install placards or something at all sewer openings." According to the witness, "this happens a couple of times a year."

"It should never happen" said Lynn Adams, president of the Pacifica Beach Coalition. Ray Biagini from the City of Pacifica Public Works Department dispatched a staff member to investigate the report.

Any discharge on the south end of Pacifica, whether it is onto the sidewalk or street or even overflowing from someone's yard, will flow into the storm drains and then into San Pedro Creek affecting all inhabitants there. From the creek it will flow into the ocean near the Pedro Point Shopping Center, further affecting the surfers and inhabitants of the ocean. From other locations in Pacifica the storm drains flow into various creeks, maybe Milagra, Calera, Big Inch, or Secret Waterfall and on to the 10 or so outflows into the Pacific ocean.

The same is true when people wash their cars outside in their driveways or wash paint brushes, stucco, and cement containers. Unless the flow goes down the sink to be treated first, everything flows to the creek or ocean. "I believe fish and wildlife deserve better from us," said Adams. "The endangered Steelhead Trout live in this creek and spawn here. Their young grow up in San Pedro Creek. None of the wildlife depending on San Pedro Creek deserve to swim in mucky water filled with toxins or floating trash. We wouldn't allow someone to do that to us in our home and we need to show the same respect to the animals who don't have a voice."

San Mateo County Water Pollution Prevention program has these tips for keeping creeks, ocean and Bay clean:

- Avoid cleaning brushes or rinsing paint containers in the street, gutter or near a storm drain. For latex paint, rinse brushes in the sink. Filter and reuse oil based paint and thinners. Recycle leftover paint at a household hazardous waste collection event, save it for touch ups or give it to someone who can use it.
- When working with concrete, cement, or mortar, prevent materials from blowing or flowing to a driveway, street, or storm drain. When excavating and landscaping, protect dirt piles from wind and rain.
- Excessive soil sediment can add too many nutrients, cloud waters, change stream temperature, limit oxygen levels, and cover spawning areas. Protecting the stream bank where accelerated erosion is occurring is very important.
- Never use fertilizers or pesticides in the riparian or aquatic zone.

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•Use a broom rather than a hose to clean up garden clippings. Don't leave leaves and lawn clippings in the gutter. Sweep any residue after yard waste pick-up, but don't sweep into the storm drain.

•Minimize grassed areas which require high maintenance. Spread mulch on bare ground to help prevent erosion and runoff. Compost your yard trimmings. •Compost is a valuable soil conditioner which gradually releases nutrients to your lawn and garden.

•Divert rain spouts and garden hoses from paved surfaces onto grass to allow filtration through the soil. Water only your lawn and garden -- not the sidewalk or driveway.

•Test your soil before applying fertilizers. Over fertilization is a common problem, and the excess can leach into ground water or contaminate creeks or the bay. Also, avoid using fertilizers near surface waters.

•Clean up after your pets. Pet waste contains nutrients and pathogens that can contaminate surface water. Dispose of pet waste in a trash can.

•Clean up spilled brake fluid, oil, grease, and antifreeze by absorbing them using kitty litter or sand and then dispose of the material at a local household hazardous waste event. Do not hose them into the street where they can eventually reach local creeks, the ocean, and Bay.

"The health of our creek and ocean is in our hands. If you witness someone discharging pollutants into the street, creek, storm drain or ocean, please use your voice to educate them or if needed report them to City of Pacifica Public Works Department, Police, or Code Enforcement," Adams said. "We've made amazing improvements for the health of our ocean. We've reduced litter and dog waste throughout Pacifica. Let's work on minimizing the other pollutants too."

For more information on helping our waterways, please go to http://flowstobay.org/cs_residents.php (http://flowstobay.org/cs_residents.php) or www.recycleworks.org (<http://www.recycleworks.org>)

-- Pacifica Beach Coalition

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