



ADMINISTRATION COMMITTEE

Agenda Report

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Agenda Item No: 9.

FROM: Robert Thompson, General Manager
Originator: Jennifer Cabral, Director of Communications

SUBJECT:

PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE FOR THE MONTH OF APRIL 2025

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend to the Board of Directors to:

Receive and file the Public Affairs Update for the month of April 2025.

BACKGROUND

Included in this report are recent activities of interest, managed by the Public Affairs Office for the month of April 2025.

RELEVANT STANDARDS

- Maintain influential legislative advocacy and a public outreach program
- Maintain collaborative and cooperative relationships with regulators, stakeholders, and neighboring communities
- Listen to and seriously consider community input on environmental concerns

PROBLEM

The Orange County Sanitation District (OC San) is a distinguished entity in the water/wastewater industry. Despite our industry recognition, there may be limited awareness among our customers regarding the pivotal role we play in protecting public health and the environment. The absence of direct communication through a billing method may contribute to this gap in knowledge.

It is our responsibility to ensure that our ratepayers comprehend the vital services we provide. Many customers may not realize that improper waste disposal into the sanitation system can adversely impact our sewer lines, reclamation plants, and the quality of water supplied through GWRS. By enhancing communication channels and fostering understanding, we aim to bridge the gap and empower our ratepayers with the knowledge needed to support and appreciate the essential work we undertake for the well-being of our community and the environment.

PROPOSED SOLUTION

By providing tours, community outreach, education, and general communication via OC San's website, social media, and direct mailings, we can share information with the community, local agencies, and businesses on our messaging such as the What2Flush program, energy production, water recycling, biosolids, and our source control program. This, in turn, helps improve the quality of wastewater that is recycled or released to the ocean and the knowledge and understanding of wastewater treatment.

RAMIFICATIONS OF NOT TAKING ACTION

Neglecting to inform the community, local agencies, and area businesses about OC San could lead to insufficient support for our mission, hindering our ability to fulfill our responsibilities effectively.

PRIOR COMMITTEE/BOARD ACTIONS

June 2024 - Received and filed the Public Affairs Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2024-2026.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Activities in April:

Outreach Report

An outreach report that includes tours, website updates, social media posts, construction notifications, speaking engagements, and more is attached to this Agenda Report.

Social Media (through April 25)

OC San messaging, announcements, and program updates were posted across OC San's social media platforms. Our social media handle is @OCSanDistrict.

- Facebook: 22 posts reaching 2.4k people
- X: 18 posts reaching 670 people
- Instagram: 27 posts reaching 13.3k people
- LinkedIn: 5 posts reaching 3.3k people

Presentations and Outreach Events

In April, OC San participated at the City of Costa Mesa Earth Day event, the Orange County Water District's Children's Water Festival, the County of Orange Supplier Outreach event, as well as the last two sessions of Wastewater 101. Our General Manager sat on a panel for OC WateReuse on the branding of Pure Water and presented at the California Water Environmental Association on PFAS and Innovative Solutions. Our Director of Environmental Services participated in a panel at the University of California, Irvine on Global Sanitation.

Staff conducted 13 tours which included, the American Society of Civil Engineers - OC Branch, Orange Coast College, Cal State University Long Beach, Hope University, Santiago High School, Operations and Administration Committee Tours, Wastewater 101 Academy and the Rosary Academy. In total we reached approximately 2,170 people. Details are included in the Outreach and Media Report.

Earth Day

On April 26, OC San took part in the Costa Mesa Earth Day event with staff volunteering at an informational booth. They shared key messages about What 2 Flush, FOG (Fats, Oil, and Grease), and answered questions from community members, helping raise awareness about OC San's role in protecting public health and the environment.

Internal Communication

Over the course of the month, there were 24 posts (as of April 25) on the employee intranet -The San Box, and four emails were distributed to staff on relevant weekly topics through our 'Three Things to Know' email. The March/April issue of the internal newsletter, Pipeline, was published to OC San staff and shared through the OC San Facebook employee and retiree group page.

External Communications

The OC San email distribution system is managed by the GovDelivery platform. In April, we sent out 5 emails reaching 2,273 recipients on our subscription lists.

Spring Media Toolkit

Each quarter, OC San shares a media toolkit with public information officers across its service area. The spring edition highlights the wide range of careers and trades available at OC San, from skilled trades to professional roles. Cities and partner agencies are encouraged to help spread the word by sharing the toolkit through their social media channels, newsletters, bill stuffers, and websites, helping connect community members to these valuable career opportunities.

Construction Outreach Update

Outreach efforts for OC San construction activities are ongoing throughout the service area. Updates were shared for projects taking place in Orange, Costa Mesa, Seal Beach, and Newport Beach through our website, email text alerts, and direct notifications. For details on each project, visit www.ocsan.gov/construction.

Wastewater 101 Citizens Academy

The OC San Wastewater 101 Citizens Academy - Spring Cohort wrapped up successfully on April 23 with a special recognition ceremony at the Board of Directors meeting. A total of 42 participants completed all four sessions of the academy and received certificates of completion-marking the highest number of graduates since the program began.

Graduating participants were invited to a behind-the-scenes tour led by General Manager, Rob Thompson of Plant Nos. 1 and 2, and the Steve Anderson Lift Station. The tour gave graduates an up-close look at the critical infrastructure that keeps our communities running.

Children's Water Festival

OC San participated in the Orange County Water District's Children's Water Festival, engaging with 4th and 5th grade students from schools across the county. Over the course of two days, more than 200 students took part in the What 2 Flush game - a fun and educational activity designed to teach kids what belongs in the toilet and what doesn't.

Awards

OC San received the Certificate of Achievement for Excellence in Financial Report. The Certificate of Achievement is the highest form of recognition in governmental accounting and financial reporting,

and its attainment represents a significant accomplishment by a government and its management. This is the 31st year OC San has received this award.

Activities in May:

Social Media

OC San continues to share messaging across the various social media platforms.

Community Outreach

In May, OC San is hosting 10 scheduled tours, welcoming a variety of groups including: Orange Coast College, Servite High School, the University of California Irvine, the Fountain Valley Chamber of Commerce, members of the California Water Environment Association, and the general public through a Public Tour.

Employee T-shirt Design Contest

OC San launched a staff-inspired T-Shirt Design Contest that celebrates creativity and pride in our mission. Employees were invited to submit original designs that reflect OC San's values, culture, and purpose which will now be submitted to a staff vote to select the winner. The winning design will be featured on shirts available in the company store and worn by staff, family, and community members. This will showcase pride in OC San and the essential services we provide.

Launching New Employee Intranet Site

The Public Affairs Office has been working closely with the IT Division to launch the updated OC San intranet site - The San Box. This revamped platform will introduce much needed upgrades to improve internal communication and enhance the overall employee experience. The new San Box is expected to launch in May.

Honor Wall Nominations

With the approval of the five nominees in April, we are now working on the preparations for the Honor Wall Ceremony. The Honor Wall celebration will be held on Wednesday, June 25 at 3:30 p.m.

CEQA

N/A

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

All items mentioned are included in OC San's FY 2024-25 and FY 2025-26 Budget.

ATTACHMENT

The following attachment(s) may be viewed on-line at the OC San website (www.ocsan.gov) with the complete agenda package:

- Outreach and Media Report - April 2025