



STEERING COMMITTEE

Agenda Report

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Agenda Date: 4/24/2024

Agenda Item No: 14.

FROM: Robert Thompson, General Manager

SUBJECT:

PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE FOR THE MONTH OF MARCH 2024

GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive and file the Public Affairs Update for the month of March 2024.

BACKGROUND

Included in this report are recent activities of interest managed by the Public Affairs Office for the month of March 2024.

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 are aware of the vital services we provide. Many customers may not realize that improper waste disposal into the sanitation system can adversely impact our sewer lines, treatment 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

July 2022 - Public Affairs Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2022-2024 approved.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Activities in March:

Outreach Report

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

Social Media

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

- Facebook: 15 posts reaching 2.8k people
- X: 11 posts reaching 705 people
- Instagram: 25 posts reaching 4.1k people
- LinkedIn: 5 posts and reaching 2.9k people

Presentations and Industry Coverage

In March, staff participated in 15 tours which included Cypress College; Santiago Canyon College; Anaheim Hills Elementary; Spirit Christian Academy; University of California, Irvine; Yucaipa Valley Water; SCAQMD; and Bassett Adult School. Staff also participated as judges in the Orange County Science and Engineering Fair, held two Wastewater 101 Citizens Academy classes, and participated in the two-day OCWD Children's Water Festival where staff engaged with over 300 students. Staff also participated in career days at Villa Park Middle School, Carver Elementary School in Long Beach, and Monte Vista Elementary School. In total, we reached 800 people for the month. Details can be found in the Outreach Report.

Internal Communication

In March, there were 61 posts on the employee intranet - *The San Box* and four weekly emails were distributed on relevant topics for the week.

Construction Outreach Update

Outreach efforts continue for OC San construction activities throughout the service area. Projects are ongoing in Fountain Valley, Costa Mesa, Buena Park, Anaheim, Newport Beach, and within both of our treatment plants. Website updates, email text alerts, and direct notifications continue to be distributed as the projects progress. Details on each project can be found at www.ocsan.gov/construction.

Employee Appreciation Day

On March 1, OC San celebrated employees by acknowledging their contributions and providing cards of appreciation that could be shared with their colleagues.

March Retirement Celebration

On March 20, OC San hosted a celebration for all retiring employees. This gave staff an opportunity to share stories and send off dedicated employees with a heartfelt goodbye. Retirees from the last couple of years were also invited to attend.

OC San Celebrates 70 Years with a Community Open House

2024 marks OC San's 70th anniversary. To commemorate this milestone, OC San is hosting a Community Open House on Saturday, June 8 to celebrate our history and achievements. Our member and sister agencies are invited to participate in the event by hosting a booth of their own. The event will be filled with informational booths, tours of the plant and headquarters, entertainment, and much more. Information is available at www.ocsan.gov.

Member Agency Toolkit

On a quarterly basis, OC San creates a toolkit of topics of interest for our member agencies to share across their various communication platforms. This quarter's toolkit focused on our upcoming Open House. The toolkit had two purposes; the first was for event promotion and the second was inviting the member agencies to participate in the event by hosting a booth of their own.

OC San Video Contest

OC San launched its 2024 Video Contest offering high school and college students who live or attend school within OC San's service area an opportunity to create an educational video. This year's theme was "Find Yourself at OC San" with the intent to highlight careers in wastewater. Video submissions were due March 31 and we received six entries. The winning videos will be showcased on our social media platforms and our website. Winners will be announced at the June Board Meeting.

Activities in April:**OC San Attends and Presents at CWEA Conference**

OC San staff from various divisions attended the CWEA Conference from April 9-12 to present on various disciplines, including research, educational outreach, automated data tools to improve lab efficiency, our thickening and dewatering plant water study, and treatment plant improvements.

La Palma Community Conversation Event

OC San participated in the La Palma Community Conversation night to discuss various OC San initiatives with residents and community members.

OC San Hosts a Booth at Costa Mesa Earth Day

OC San is participating in an Earth Day event held by the City of Costa Mesa on April 20. Staff will talk with residents about OC San and all that we do to support public health and the environment.

OC San Connection Newsletter

The spring issue of the OC San Connection is scheduled for publication and distribution in April. The issue will include highlights of our history, information about the Open House, and construction improvements throughout our service area. The newsletter is distributed electronically to approximately 4,000 people.

Take a Kit to Your Kid Day

This year, the "Take Your Kid to Work Day" event has been switched around. A fun activity kit is being sent home with parents to share with their children to show them their role at OC San. The activities are fun-filled for both children and parents. The kit includes worksheets, coloring sheets, goodies, and more.

OC San's Local Lobbyist on Board

As part of OC San's Strategic Plan, a local lobbyist was brought on board to assist with local agency outreach. The initial kick-off meeting occurred this month. Beginning next month, a report on activities will be included in the Outreach Report.

CEQA

N/A

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

All items mentioned are included in OC San's FY 2022-2024 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 - March 2024