

# Orange County Sanitation District Organizational Advocacy and Outreach Policy Paper

## Summary Policy Statement

The Orange County Sanitation District (OC San) will create and disseminate information to our stakeholders with an end goal to educate, inform, and garner support for the services provided thus allowing us to operate in a more efficient and effective manner. OC San will deliver messages that are accurate, transparent, and designed to foster public trust and confidence. Additionally, legislative oversight will ensure OC San's interests are protected.

## Background:

OC San provides regional sewer service for 2.6 million people living, working, and commuting in central and northwest Orange County. The various stakeholders include over 600 employees, 50 local elected officials appointed to our Board of Directors, regulators, policy makers, and the public. It is critical for OC San to have a multi-pronged outreach program to reach the intended audiences and to gain support for OC San's mission.

OC San provides services and tools to effectively communicate about the various programs that help achieve its mission. This includes:

- Student Educational Outreach:  
Promoting and educating the youth within our service area on OC San's work and the essential service provided. Reaching out to students allows for our future generations to be aware of the environmental impact we each make and what we can accomplish working together. This knowledge will help our future generations to take action and make positive changes. It also introduces them to an industry they may be unaware of as a career choice. We do this through programs such as Inside the Outdoors which goes directly into classrooms to teach the wastewater treatment process; school-based plant tours that give them an inside view into a treatment plan and how the system works; events such as the Youth Environmental Summit (YES) which provides an opportunity to reach thousands of local children in a short amount of time with clear and direct messaging; and contest such as the Public Service Announcement which is an incentive for students to get involved in developing messages for environmental issues.
- Infrastructure Outreach:  
OC San has \$11 billion in infrastructure that must be maintained, replaced, and enhanced to continue providing the essential service of protecting public health and the environment. Forming a positive presence in the community prior to the

start of construction projects or maintenance activities is imperative to build trust, understanding, and support for the necessary construction. This is done through an extensive outreach program that develops and implements communication tools to engage the communities affected by OC San construction projects such as a Community Liaison, dedicated construction webpage, collateral material, etc. Over the next fiscal year about two dozen projects will be in construction with various degree of public impacts.

- Employee Engagement:

Open and honest communication with our employees creates a positive and trusting environment thus resulting in a more engaged workforce and ambassadors for our agency. OC San creates employee engagement by utilizing various communication methods to share agency wide messages. With over 600 employees with various backgrounds, work hours, and access to online a diverse toolkit of communication pieces allows messages to be delivered to staff. This includes The San Box (intranet), Pipeline Newsletter, Digester (messaging piece), Three Things to Know email, etc.

- Brand Recognition:

As an industry leader OC San must ensure its brand and image are portrayed accurately and positively. A cohesive voice, message, look, and feel are critical to the public perception we have, and the trust granted to us by the community we serve and the stakeholders we work with. To build and maintain a positive image, we engage in general outreach efforts such as general plant tours; community newsletters; a Speakers Bureau Program which allows us to go into the community and meet with various groups to inform them of who we are and what we do; an informative and educational website, an active social media presence; and the development of program such as Wastewater 101 Academy to provide for our ratepayers, fellow agencies, and influential public to showcase OC San operations and initiatives.

OC San also recognizes the need for an active local, state, and federal legislative and regulatory advocacy program to ensure that the interests of the rate payers and the Board of Directors are protected and supported. Towards that end, the legislative and regulatory team actively engages, pursues, and monitors activities in California and Washington, D.C. and takes appropriate action in support of or opposition to legislative and regulatory initiatives.

### **Current Situation:**

OC San is an industry leader involved in innovative and significant programs. However, it is most often seen as a silent utility due to its seamless operation. It is not until the

unexpected happens that we are noticed and typically not in a favorable manner. More often than not, people don't think twice about their wastewater or where it goes.

In addition, OC San has no direct connection to its rate payers. User fees are paid via property taxes thus eliminating an opportunity to reach our customers directly. This ultimately results in a limited understanding of OC San, what we do, and the import service provided to the community.

To that extend, OC San's outreach efforts are imperative to inform and educate the public we serve, including policy makers and regulators.

### **Policy Statement**

OC San will creatively and effectively develop communication tools and tactics to inform and educate our various stakeholders. As a silent utility, it is imperative that OC San build a bank of trust to garner support and understanding for the multitude of programs that allow us to continue protecting the environment. OC San's outreach efforts will be clear and transparent to demonstrate our reliability and thus gain trust and confidence from those we serve, our fellow agencies and organizations in the wastewater world.

This will be supported by legislative and regulatory outreach efforts to ensure the wastewater industry is able to operate in the best interests of its constituents.

### **Initiatives to Support Progress Toward the Policy Goal**

**Initiative:** Relaunch the Vendor Outreach Program with a focus on Orange County to enhance the competitive bidding opportunities for OC San. This effort will increase the number of vendor and contractors soliciting OC San projects thus expand the pool and providing a greater variety of partners.

**Initiative:** Develop an outreach program for member agencies regarding inflow and infiltration issues emerging within their sewer system. The program will aim to educate, inform, and improve the situation affecting the local and regional sewer system.

**Initiative:** Develop an educational display in the Headquarters building to illustrate OC San's reuse and recycling efforts in support of the environment and public health. Display to be revealed when new building is unveiled.

**Initiative:** Commemorate OC San's achievement of reusing 100 percent of the reclaimable flow upon completion of the Groundwater Replenishment System's Final Expansion. Celebrate the milestone and acknowledge the accomplishment with staff and stakeholders.

**Initiative:** Actively engage, pursue, and monitor activities in California and Washington, D.C. and take appropriate action in support of or opposition to legislative and regulatory initiatives affecting OC San and the wastewater industry through Monitoring and Analysis, Advocacy Days, Position letters and Funding Requests (as deemed suitable).