

A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT: The Environmental Auditing Program



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OCSD’s Environmental Auditing Program (EAP) is an essential element of the Environmental Services Department’s environmental compliance strategy. The purpose of this program is to provide independent verification that all divisions comply with the required environmental laws, regulations, and policies. In essence, audits help ensure OCSD adheres to permits and regulations as well as policies and procedures to avoid violations and ultimately enforcement actions by regulatory agencies.

The EAP has established a culture that emphasizes continuous improvement, strong agency-wide cooperation, and effective lines of communication. This is through support from management and a wealth of institutional knowledge held by subject matter experts. Proactivity and due diligence are key messages of the EAP. “The program reveals that all of us here at OCSD have the same mission: To protect public health and the

environment by providing effective wastewater collection, treatment, and recycling,” stated Michele Farmer, Principal Environmental Specialist and EAP program manager, “standardization of structure and open communication are essential components to the audit process.”

Three recently completed audits were of the Waste Discharge Requirements (WDR), Air Quality, and Stormwater programs. The subject matter experts for these audits are Dindo Carrillo, Randa AbuShaban, and Michelle Breiter, respectively. However, the EAP is not delegated to one person or department, but instead envelops all departments, promoting agency-wide joint efforts to remain proactive. There are three areas of findings from an audit: compliance, conformance, and best management practices. Since the focus of the EAP remains tethered to continuous improvement, all findings are reviewed to improve each compliance area. Staff work together to solve problems and share

cross-departmental knowledge. Well defined best management practices are often recommended and revealed during the audit process.

As the EAP looks ahead to the future, Michele Farmer is confident that one aspect will remain constant, “the culture of continuous improvement is rooted in proactivity and due diligence.” The work we perform at OCSD is done with the community in mind; the EAP helps OCSD achieve its mission of protecting public health and the environment. Michele and all those who take part in the EAP receive a sense of purpose and satisfaction in knowing they are doing the right thing.

As Director of Environmental Services, Jim Colston acknowledges that “The success of the EAP program is found in the determination of all those involved to continue to understand that their work is essential in meeting the goals of OCSD. Commitment, communication, and a desire to improve compliance are what drives the EAP forward.” So, thank you to the Environmental Services Department for designing a robust program that exceeds expectations and enables OCSD’s mission to be upheld.

