

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, following legislative activity will ensure OC San's interests are explained and considered.

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. These programs include:

- **Student Educational Outreach:**
Promoting and educating the youth within our service area on OC San's mission and the essential services provided. Reaching out to students allows for 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 plant 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 contests 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 designed, operated, 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. This includes dedicated Community Liaisons, construction webpages, collateral material, presentations, etc. Over the next fiscal year about two dozen projects will be in construction with various degrees 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. A diverse toolkit of communication pieces allows messages to be delivered to over 600 staff with various professional backgrounds, work shifts, work locations, and access to online materials. This toolkit of communication pieces 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 maintaining a positive public perception 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 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 programs such as Wastewater 101 Academy which provides an opportunity to showcase OC San's operations and initiatives for our ratepayers, fellow agencies, and influential public.

- Regulatory and Legislative Advocacy:

OC San also recognizes the need for an active regulatory and legislative advocacy program at the local, state, and federal levels to ensure that the interests of the rate payers and the Board of Directors are communicated, understood, and supported. Towards this end, the legislative and regulatory team actively monitors and engages officials across California and in 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 consistent attainment of its mission. News coverage for a wastewater resource recovery agency is most often about a mission

failure. People tend not to think about their wastewater or where it goes until a beach is closed or a spill occurs.

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

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

Future 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 connect with the public we serve in a clear and transparent way to create a bank of trust, and garner support for the programs that allow us to continue protecting the public health and the environment.

OC San will maintain an active legislative and regulatory outreach program to help inform and guide leaders to ensure the wastewater industry is able to protect the public health and environment in a cost-effective way.

Initiatives to Support Progress Toward the Policy Goal

- Relaunch the Vendor Outreach Program with a focus on Orange County firms to enhance the competitive bidding opportunities for OC San. This effort will increase the number of vendors and contractors soliciting OC San projects, thus expanding the pool of service providers thus generating a greater variety of partners.
- Develop an outreach program for member agencies regarding inflow and infiltration issues within their sewer systems. The program will aim to educate, inform, and reduce inflow and infiltration affecting the local and regional sewer system.
- 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.
- 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.
- Actively monitor and engage regulatory and legislative activity across 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. This includes using Monitoring and Analysis, Advocacy Days, Position letters and Funding Requests (as deemed suitable).

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