



## Agenda Report

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**FROM:** Robert Thompson, General Manager

**SUBJECT:**

**PUBLIC AFFAIRS UPDATE FOR THE MONTH OF FEBRUARY 2024**

**GENERAL MANAGER'S RECOMMENDATION**

RECOMMENDATION: Recommend to the Board of Directors to:

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

**BACKGROUND**

Included in this report are recent activities of interest managed by the Public Affairs Office for the month of February 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 is 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, 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 for the month of February 2024:

#### 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: 17 posts reaching 2.5k people
- X: 9 posts reaching 557 people
- Instagram: 43 posts reaching 5.8k people
- LinkedIn: 2 posts and reaching 1.5k people

#### Presentations and Industry Coverage

In February, staff participated in eight tours which included Godinez High School, El Modena High School, OCWD staff, new OC San employees, Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, Inside the Outdoors, and the Air and Waste Management Association. OC San had a strong presence at the Pretreatment, Pollution, Prevention and Stormwater Conference in Anaheim where our General Manager, Rob Thompson, presented on Building a Culture of Accomplishment at Your Agency, staff presented on Source Control Success Stories and Regional Agency Perspectives, and Administration Manager Jennifer Cabral facilitated a roundtable on Communications & Public Outreach. Staff also presented to the Huntington Beach Christian Elementary School on What2Flush and to the Bay Area Clean Water Agency. At the end of February, Mr. Thompson participated in OCWD's webinar series and spoke on the Supercritical Water Oxidation Project. In total, we reached 1.4k people for the month. Details can be found in the Outreach Report.

## **Internal Communication**

In February, there were 49 posts on the employee intranet -*The San Box*, four weekly emails distributed on relevant topics for the week, and the bi-monthly newsletter, *Pipeline*, was distributed with a new look resembling a multi-page magazine.

## **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](http://www.ocsan.gov/construction).

## **OC San Celebrates 70 Years of Environmental Excellence with a Community Open House**

2024 marks OC San's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary. To commemorate this milestone, OC San will celebrate throughout the year by sharing historical information and achievements through online posts, videos, and social media. We are hosting a Community Open House on Saturday, June 8 to celebrate our history and achievements. Our member and sister agencies will be invited to participate in the event to host a booth of their own. Additional details will be sent via email to our member agencies and communicated with the public through our various communication channels.

## **OC San Launches Video Contest**

OC San has launched the 2024 Video Contest for high school and college students in OC San's service area. The theme of the video is "Find Yourself at OC San" which is intended to promote careers within the wastewater field. The videos will be featured on our social media platforms and website with an opportunity to win one of five prizes. Full contest details can be found at [www.ocsan.gov/video](http://www.ocsan.gov/video).

## **Westminster TET Parade**

In February, staff participated in the Westminster TET Parade. Staff walked in the parade with our golf cart and handed out educational items to onlookers who were lining the streets.

## **OC San Wins Award**

OC San and OCWD were awarded the National Environmental Achievement Community Leadership award for the Final Expansion of the GWRS. Mr. Thompson attended the Winter Conference held in Austin, Texas to accept the award on behalf of both agencies.

## **Inside the Outdoors**

In February, OC San worked with Inside the Outdoors and the Anaheim School District to create a video that will be played for middle and high school students. The video aims to showcase OC San, what we do, and provide information on the various career opportunities.

## **OC San Community Newsletter**

OC San's quarterly newsletter, the *OC San Connection*, was distributed electronically in February to our service area. The newsletter is intended to share news of interest to our public. The winter issue included articles on our 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, upcoming construction projects, the video contest, and the Wastewater 101 Citizens Academy.

## Upcoming Activities for March:

### 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 will host a celebration for all retiring employees. This will give staff an opportunity to share stories and send off our dedicated employees with a heartfelt goodbye. Retirees from the last couple of years are also invited to attend.

### Children's Water Festival

OC San will be participating in OCWD's Children's Water Festival later this month. OC San will host an informational booth along with a relay race game where kids learn about What2Flush. Over the two-day period, OC San will engage with 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, and 5<sup>th</sup> graders throughout Orange County.

### Wastewater 101 Citizens Academy

OC San's Wastewater 101 Citizens Academy began on March 7 with 69 registered participants. The virtual Academy features four workshops over the course of two months and is hosted and presented by OC San staff. The four workshops focus on: Who We Are and What We Do, OC San- the Nuts and Bolts, Capital Improvement Program, and Environmental Services. The program is free to attend.

### 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](http://www.ocsan.gov)) with the complete agenda package:*

- Outreach and Media Report - February 2024