

Saginaw Bay Coastal Initiative (SBCI) Combined Sewage Overflow (CSO) Workgroup

SBCI CSO Workgroup Notes - March 26, 2009

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Call To Order:

The workgroup was called to order at 1:30 p.m.

Those present were:

Laura Ogar, Environmental Affairs & Community Development; Thomas McDowell, DEQ; Robert Hill, Environmental Health; Mike Kelly, TCF/WIN; Pete Ostlund, MDEQ; Jon Bloemker, MDEQ; Ken Miller, BCDUS; and Cyndi Gaul, Environmental Affairs & Community Development.

SBCI CSO Workgroup Objective:

Laura discussed the public demand for changes in the way the community 'government' handles CSO events as people are outraged by their occurrence. She noted the March 25th Press Release from the Environmental Affairs & Community Development Department regarding the illegal discharge of sewage from a marine vessel or freighter in the bay caused aggressive hate mail and voice mail which centered around the public being angry that 'we' (government) allow CSOs. People were irate. The public wants something to be done. Laura stated that as a CSO workgroup and there has to be more of a teamwork effort by MDEQ to step up and take action to provide information.

Pete felt that public opinion couldn't be measured through newspaper responses and he believes that only angry people voice their opinions in such a forum. Pete felt that the DEQ was present at the SBCI CSO Workgroup Meetings to provide information. He would like to see the group educate the public on what exactly CSOs are and the impact of CSOs on water quality in relation to other sources.

Discussion of Preparation for a Public Meeting:

The MDEQ is prepared to gather information in order to educate people. Pete thought that a public meeting could be scheduled by July at which time the MDEQ will be able to have produced informational pie charts that show the affects of phosphorus and E.Coli in the water. Laura said that she would like to see the DEQ permits for facilities discharging into the Saginaw River and some discussion on what that data showed. Laura said some review of the water quality data from the overflows at the treatment facilities would be a good education tool. It's important to let the public know what the current standards are and show that they are being met. Laura would also like to show the public what's involved in getting a permit to discharge, showing them actual requirements. People respond well to data and it's important to show the community information that will help educate them about CSO events. The group needs to take a look at compiled data and determine what it shows and how it can be used to educate. Pete explained that all CSO discharge contains phosphorus and bacteria, though they are at the water quality standards found acceptable for CSO events. Thomas discussed that muck, which is fed by phosphorus, is another issue that could be addressed when educating the public about water quality.

Laura stated that the public was upset about CSO events and that the focus for the SBCI CSO Workgroup needed to be on the actual CSO problem and not get side tracked on the 'impacts' as defined by muck on the beach, reduced tourism, marketing challenges, etc. But she noted there seems to be a difference in terms as DEQ mentions impacts as something else. Pete said the perception the public has that CSOs are bad needs to be changed through education. Jon thought a good way to educate the public would be through the local newspaper.

Pete discussed the idea that while treated discharges should be reported to the MDEQ, it really didn't

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seem necessary to report them to the newspaper if the discharges were adequately treated. He felt that if a discharge was compliant with standards, there was no violation and therefore no reason to report the discharge to the local newspaper. Pete discussed the idea that perhaps the way to change public perception was to change the laws of reporting CSO Events. As it stands now everything must be reported to the local newspaper, both the treated and untreated discharges. He felt it was important to better define CSO Events.

Laura again said she felt the group needed to define what it means by 'impact' in the sense of CSO discharge events and education. The feedback Laura has received from the public is that a CSO Event impacts the river, that it discharges sewage bacteria and this is very upsetting to the public.

Robert discussed the fact that the Bay County Health Department requires bacteria samples upstream and downstream from a CSO discharge. Ken said he could also provide a bacteria sample at the point of discharge.

The group discussed the need to include economics as a factor in the discussions about CSOs. The group needs to bring economics into the discussion in order for the public to determine what price they are willing to pay to make changes.

For the next meeting Laura would like to have the MDEQ provide the following:

- Treatment Plant Discharge Permits
- CSO discharge data
- Education Ideas
- Water Quality Standard Guidelines – so we can see how Michigan standards compare with other states. Also to bring into the discussion human health issues.

Pete said that the Michigan Standards for discharges came out before the National Standards. Therefore, Michigan has more restrictive standards to protect our waterways. In Michigan our waterways are used by so many people the State felt it was important to keep the standards high.

Laura discussed that a July Public Meeting would be good, however there may be a need for more than one meeting. Laura thought that possibly the group should host up to at least three meetings to really help get information out about CSO events. There's so much information to present that it's important to have more than one meeting. Laura would like to see qualitative data for the public along with National Standards and maybe some rough cost estimates. Pete said that by July the MDEQ should be able to produce pie charts explaining the pollutants of concern. However, Pete said that a cost analysis would take more time to produce. Laura felt very strongly that at some point some sort of cost estimates for reducing CSO events will be needed for a public meeting.

Mike felt it might be helpful for the group to contact environmental groups to get some of the preliminary information out before the public meeting. Pete thought that maybe the group could host environmental groups at a May meeting. Laura felt that it was important for the group to take the opportunity to start public education now. We don't want to overload the public with too much information. It's important to get some information out to the community.

Laura had to leave the meeting early, but left the group to discuss: How best to get presentation material for the Public Meeting; How to provide historical information at the Public Meeting to show where we've

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been and where we're going, and; How much money are local people willing to spend to clean up CSOs.

Public Meeting Continued:

Ken discussed how Bay County would look if there were no Waste Water Treatment plant and thought that would be a great point to hit home with the community. Discussion continued regarding that since the Bay City Times was going down to being a 3-day a week publication and wouldn't be a daily syndicated newspaper, there may be no need to continue to provide them with water treatment plant discharge from CSO events information. It was described that by not having the information published in the Bay City Times it might stop some of the negative press regarding CSO events. Pete felt that it was very important to provide some before and after stories about the way CSOs are handled and to show how far we've come.

The MDEQ will outline information for the May SBCI CSO Meeting. Pete would like to see the group contact various environmental groups in order to get their input for the SBCI CSO Public Meeting.

Mike said he'll talk to Laura about which environmental groups would be best to contact for this effort. Mike also felt it would be good for the group to go to their meetings to talk to them about the subject, rather than have them attend the SBCI CSO Workgroup Meetings to start with.

Pete thought it would be good to contact Jeff Mayes as he is very interested in this subject. Pete said that he believed that Jeff Mayes has an interest in having the laws changed with regards to how CSO events are reported. Pete thought the group should compile some background information from the various groups to provide to Jeff Mayes.

Pete mentioned that he would also contact Paul Zuger with MUCC as he is interested in changing the laws regarding CSOs. Pete thought Paul Zuger would be the best person to talk to Jeff Mayes about this subject. Pete also thought Paul Zuger should make a presentation on the radio show hosted by Jeff Mayes regarding CSOs.

Pete discussed that untreated discharge into the waterways never receives the focus it should. Treated discharge and un-treated discharge is reported the same way so there's no differentiation between them. Pete felt that the public really needed to be educated on the difference between treated and un-treated discharge. The group discussed the importance of the public knowing about each and every discharge. The group also felt it was important for the public to understand that there are a number of pollutants that impact water quality.

Adjournment:

The March 26, 2009 meeting of the SBCI CSO Workgroup was adjourned at 2:53 p.m.

Meeting Schedule:

SBCI CSO Workgroup Meetings will take place on the 4th Thursday of the month at 1:30 p.m.

Next Meeting:

Thursday, April 23, 2009 at 1:30 p.m. in the MDEQ Office located at 401 Ketchum Street, Bay City, Michigan 48708.