

Manager's Column

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"What's that Smell?" Sewer Odor is Temporary

The mission of the Nipomo Community Services District is to provide its customers with reliable, quality, and cost-effective services now and in the future.

The Nipomo Community Services District operates a Sewer Treatment Plant west of Highway 101 on the southern edge of Nipomo. Strawberry fields to the south and open range land to the west generally provide for a fair amount of space between the Plant, homes and business. Recently the Plant odor has caused problems for the community.

In 2014 the old sewer plant was retired after serving the community for 30 years and a new, modern plant was commissioned. The new plant opened under a new permit from the State Water Resource Control Board ("SWRCB"), the permitting agency that oversees sewer plants. A requirement of this new operating permit from the SWRCB was that the drying beds for the bio-solids (a term for the nutrient-rich organic byproducts resulting from sewer treatment) needed to be concrete lined. This improvement reduces the risk of contaminating our ground water - a good thing.

The Plant's drying process was disrupted by all the rain due to the duration of the rainy season that extended into Spring. The Plant has the capacity to hold a year's worth of bio-solid. The District held onto months of material waiting for the traditional warm Nipomo weather to dry this material. The warm weather came late in the year. As a consequence, the Plant is holding more old bio-solids. The old bio-solids have to be turned to help dry and this causes odors.

The District is looking at short-term and long-term solutions to solve the immediate odor problem and make sure we don't repeat this problem. In the short-term, the District is evaluating equipment that accelerates the drying process. Ultimately, the bio-solids need to be dried and hauled off-site to a composting facility where it is valued as fertilizer. This is a cost-savings to the District as the old Plant required bio-solids to be sent to the landfill at a greater cost.

The District's long-term plan is to invest in a solution that keeps winter rains off the drying beds as well as evaluating equipment that will mechanically de-water the bio-solids so they are not subject to weather conditions for drying. This is an expensive solution but a solution that may be necessary to control odors.

The drought years caused our community to pull together and conserve the precious rain we received. Now, after experiencing above-average rainfall during an expanded rainy season, we are faced with a new challenge. The good news is that this new challenge is one we can more easily overcome and manage. It will take several more weeks of warm weather, but there is an end in sight.

The District is part of the community and is committed to solving the odor problem as quickly as possible. Measures will be taken to ensure a repeat of this condition will not occur. The District is sincerely sorry for causing our community this temporary discomfort, but we are working to correct the situation.

Until next time...

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