

Environmental reporter Christopher Dunagan discusses the challenges of protecting Puget Sound and all things water-related.

## Bainbridge cleans up sewer mess; Victoria steps up

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The Bainbridge Island sewage spill, estimated at 140,000 gallons, was blamed on a break in a 32-year-old pipe buried in the beach and subject to saltwater corrosion.



*Before final repairs, a temporary band slowed the flow of sewage*  
Kitsap Sun photo by Tristan Baurick

While Bainbridge Island cleaned up its sewage today, the city of Victoria — which has been dumping raw sewage into the Strait of Juan de Fuca for decades — took steps to clean up its mess as well. Regional officials took action on a plan to build a series of four sewage-treatment plants at a cost of \$1.2 billion. Progress, yes, but work is still years away. More about that in a moment.

Damage to the environment in and around Bainbridge Island’s Eagle Harbor is expected to be temporary, according to Larry Altose, spokesman for the Washington Department of Ecology, who was quoted in a [Kitsap Sun story](#) by Tristan Baurick.

“As awful as a sewer release sounds, the impact of this size of spill is short-term,” Altose said, noting that sunlight and other organisms will quickly kill or eat most of the sewage contaminants within days.

Ecology could fine the city up to \$10,000 a day for the spill. The city's response and track record with maintenance can be considered.

“We can fine, but that's not the point,” Altose said. “The point is to have lessons learned and have the proper steps for prevention.”

One lesson that everyone has been learning over the past few years is that sewer lines buried in the beach are trouble. We all know why they were installed there in the first place — because it is cheaper to build in the beach than to clear a route through trees and across ravines in the uplands.

Sewer lines in the beach are a problem that many cities must face, and they should be inspecting buried pipes on a regular schedule. We'll see what Ecology's investigation turns up with respect to Bainbridge Island's maintenance.

Meanwhile, Bremerton and Poulsbo also face issues with worn-out pipes, and we don't yet know what the solution will be. Bremerton, if you recall, has proposed a boardwalk that can support a vacuum truck to maintain the pipe after it is replaced in the beach ([Water Ways, Sept. 22, 2008](#)). That design is under scrutiny by the Army Corps of Engineers and other state and federal agencies.

As for Victoria, city officials maintained for years that they should be allowed to discharge raw sewage into the Strait of Juan de Fuca, because the swift waters dilute the pollution. Three years ago, the Minister of Environment for British Columbia said that was no longer acceptable and that treatment systems would be required for the municipalities of Colwood, Esquimalt, Langford, Oak Bay, Saanich, Victoria and View Royal, all under the Capital Regional District.



*Capital Regional District wastewater plan area (Click to enlarge) /// CRT graphic*

Of the 14 politicians who sit on a sewage planning committee, 11 voted today to proceed on the massive project, estimated to cost \$1.2 billion, according to a report from Rob Shaw of the [Victoria Times Colonist](#). Nobody can say that the action comes easy.

The vote endorses a plan for treatment plants in Saanich East, Esquimalt, Victoria and the West Shore. The regional district must decide on exact locations, the type of “secondary treatment” plant to build and how to divided up the cost, which has stymied the political leaders. Plants would be turned on by 2016, under the plan.

“Show me the money or we’re not going anywhere else,” said Saanich Councilor Wayne Hunter in Shaw’s story. “I won’t support anything in the future if I don’t see a greater commitment coming from the pockets of the feds.”

“We’re not allowed to deal with the real question,” added Oak Bay Councilor John Herbert. “We’re being told what to do. My preference would be to tell the province, ‘No we’re not going to do this, and if you want to waste the taxpayers money go ahead.’ However, I assume no one has that level of courage, and so we must carry on.”

For more about sewage treatment, check out the video (below) from the Capital Regional District or visit the CRD’s Web site called [“Wastewater Treatment Made Clear.”](#)

[Georgia Strait Alliance](#), an environmental group, also offers a good deal of information about the history and future of the project.