



## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Long Beach City Auditor Identifies Improvements to Prevent Sanitary Sewer Overflows Which Can Cause Environmental & Health Impacts** ***Long Beach Water Department Implements Recommendations Adding to their Existing Plan to Reduce Overflows***

Long Beach, CA – Long Beach City Auditor Laura Doud today released the [Sanitary Sewer Overflow Prevention Performance Audit](#). The Long Beach Water Department (LBWD)'s Sewer Division oversees the operations and maintenance on 712 miles of sewer lines, including the collection of nearly 45 million gallons of sanitary sewage per day from residences and businesses, and the transportation of it through sewer lines to a treatment plant. Sanitary Sewer Overflows (SSOs) occur when sewage is discharged into the environment.

From 2014 to 2018, Long Beach experienced 103 SSOs. The majority of SSOs in Long Beach were Category 3 which are not severe. Category 3 SSOs are less than 1,000 gallons of wastewater and do not reach surface water. However, Long Beach had more SSOs than 75% of similarly-sized agencies. While the LBWD has kept severe SSOs to a minimum, the potential adverse impacts of SSOs include environmental damage, public health risks, beach closures, business closures, damage to property, and financial costs and penalties against the City. The audit identified the need to reevaluate and improve activities such as cleaning, inspection, repairs, tracking and education aimed at preventing SSOs to ensure their effectiveness and achieve its goal of reducing SSOs.

LBWD's Sewer System Management Plan (SSMP) is mostly meeting Federal and State requirements aimed at reducing preventable SSOs, and the Department is meeting its preventative sewer line maintenance and repair targets. However, the audit found the annual number of SSOs has stayed relatively consistent in the past three years, averaging about 21 SSOs per year. The audit also found that the current targets for routine maintenance, like cleaning and inspecting, need to be re-examined to determine whether they are at the appropriate frequencies to best reduce SSOs. Furthermore, additional attention and resources are required to address the repair backlog, which has increased 62% over the five years reviewed.

Seventy-one percent of SSOs in Long Beach, over the five years reviewed, were caused by fats, oils, and grease, collectively known as FOG. The FOG Control Program, jointly overseen by LBWD and the Long Beach Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS), needs improvement. More than one-third of FOG-prone food franchise brands in Long Beach did not receive inspections at all locations. The checklist used by DHHS inspectors lack details to ensure thorough FOG inspections. Expectations for proper disposal of FOG are not comprehensively communicated to food facilities. Lastly, LBWD's outreach efforts need to focus on residents and their role in preventing FOG-related SSOs.

"I commend the Long Beach Water Department for having a plan in place that is in line with regulatory requirements regarding Sanitary Sewer Overflows, and I am pleased the Water Department and Department of Health & Human Services have agreed with all 25 audit recommendations to improve sewer line maintenance, repairs, tracking and preventative education," said City Auditor Laura Doud. "The Departments have been extremely cooperative throughout this audit process, and we appreciate them being proactive in beginning to implement recommendations. By making these changes, the City can better meet its goal of reducing Sanitary Sewer Overflows."

LBWD and DHHS have already begun implementing recommendations such as developing a system that will allow them to monitor the effectiveness of maintenance targets, incorporating trenchless technology to increase the rate at which repairs are completed, collaborating to improve educational FOG materials for businesses and residents, and using multiple sources to identify all FOG-prone food facilities to ensure they are inspected.

The Departments responded to the audit saying, “We are pleased to report that many of the recommendations have since been implemented, and those remaining will soon be implemented. We are confident that these changes will improve the effectiveness of our Fats, Oils, and Grease (FOG) control strategy, and will be beneficial for our long-term goal of reducing the frequency of SSOs.”

The complete Sanitary Sewer Overflow Prevention Performance Audit can be viewed [here](#) and the Report Highlights Sheet can be viewed [here](#).

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