



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

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November 7, 2011

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Jonathan E. Fielding, M.D., M.P.H. *J. Fielding MD*  
Director and Health Officer

SUBJECT: **PROPOSED PROGRAM CHANGES AND/OR ALTERNATIVE FUNDING  
OPTIONS FOR NON-FEE SUPPORTED ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH  
SERVICES**

This is to provide you with a report on proposed program changes and/or alternative funding options for certain non-fee supported Department of Public Health (DPH) Environmental Health (EH) services.

**Background**

As part of the recent study conducted to revise public health permit fees, it was determined that a set of EH services could no longer be supported by the fee model because these services could not be reasonably associated with "individual fee payers." The services cost approximately \$3.2 million and include the following: complaint response in housing units of four or less (which are not subject to licensing); ocean water monitoring/beach grading; disease vector surveillance and control in public areas; inspection of County and city detention facilities; community noise assessments and enforcement of the County Noise Ordinance; and the assessment of indoor air quality related to lead and asbestos.

As an interim measure, the cost of these services has been included in the adopted FY 2011-12 DPH budget. However, DPH has a number of fiscal constraints principally related to the downturn in the economy and funding for these services will not be able to be maintained in FY 2012-13 unless program changes are implemented, alternative funding is identified, and/or other EH activities are curtailed. Consequently, DPH has undertaken a review of these services, as detailed in the following sections, to implement more efficient use of limited resources; ensure the allocation of resources is based on risk; and identify alternative funding options.

**Unlicensed Housing Complaints**

*Description:* EH's response to unlicensed housing complaints involves the investigation of health and safety concerns at residential structures comprised of one to four units. (License fees are collected for structures of five or more units and provide funding for routine inspections and complaint investigations.). These structures are typically rental dwellings, and complaints may be initiated by a

resident against a neighboring property, or by a tenant against their landlord, or may be referred to EH through local government agencies. The complaints have varying public health impacts and are typically associated with sewage discharge, faulty plumbing, lack of water, rodent infestation, dog droppings, trash and debris in the yard, and poor maintenance.

*Current Annual Workload:* Approximately 11,700 investigations, averaging 2.8 hours each, for a total of 32,760 hours.

*Current level of funding:* \$ 1,500,000 (19 positions)

*Proposed Program Changes:* EH will focus complaint response on those situations with the highest potential impact on public health, such as sewage discharge, lack of water, rodent infestation, or other "high risk" conditions. EH estimates that high risk conditions are associated with a third of all unlicensed housing complaints. Where appropriate, complainants will be redirected to other governmental agencies, such as code enforcement, building and safety, and animal care and control.

It is estimated that this proposed program change would reduce operating costs from \$1,500,000 to \$510,000, representing a staff reduction of 12 positions. These positions would be reassigned to fill vacancies in other EH fee-supported programs.

*Results:* If funding is reduced to \$510,000, then approximately 7,600 investigations will not be conducted. Without any funding, all 11,700 investigations will not be conducted.

*Alternative Funding:* EH, in conjunction with the Treasurer-Tax Collector (TTC), is also exploring a billing mechanism as a way to recover costs from non-compliant unlicensed property owners, where appropriate.

### **Rodent Suppression and Vectorborne Disease Surveillance**

*Description:* EH's response to rodent suppression and vectorborne disease surveillance includes reducing rodent populations on public property, such as streets, alleys, and freeway embankments. The service also includes the trapping of Norway rats in the downtown Los Angeles area and testing the rodents for plague, endemic typhus, Seoul virus, Bartonella species, and Hepatitis E.

*Current Annual Workload:* Approximately 2,800 investigations, each averaging 4.1 hours, for a total of 11,480 hours.

*Current level of funding:* \$760,000 (6 positions)

*Proposed Program Changes:* EH will focus on disease surveillance and rodent suppression activities in locations where there is a higher potential risk to human health. Such locations include schools, housing, and places where high numbers of people gather or pass through. EH will screen incoming complaints and respond only to higher-risk conditions, and refer lower-risk complaints to other agencies, as appropriate. EH believes that reducing the annual funding allocation by a third, from \$760,000 to \$504,000 is reasonable.

*Results:* If funding is reduced to \$504,000 then approximately 930 surveillance and suppression activities will not be conducted. Without any funding, all 2,800 surveillance and suppression activities will not be conducted.

*Supplemental Funding:* EH will seek funding from the City of Los Angeles to support annual rodent suppression costs of \$100,000 for the downtown Los Angeles area.

### **Ocean Monitoring / Beach Grading**

*Description:* Ocean monitoring and beach grading involves the weekly sampling of water at 40 beach locations throughout the year and at Avalon Harbor during the summer and fall seasons. Test results are routinely posted on the DPH website. If testing shows that water quality poses a potential health risk, warning signs are posted at the beach.

*Current Annual Workload:* Approximately 2,080 samples collected, each averaging 2.8 staff hours per sample, for a total of 5,824 hours.

*Current level of funding:* \$390,000 (3 positions and laboratory costs)

*Proposed Program Changes:* EH will consider reductions in the scope and frequency of sampling, and employ alternative sampling methods such as the use of rapid test methods that do not require full laboratory analysis. EH will examine the possible elimination of sampling sites, as well as testing following rainfall events, where water quality trends have been clearly established. It is projected that with these changes a 35% reduction in costs can be reasonably achieved. EH will maintain its response capability to test and post warning / closure in emergencies.

*Results:* If funding is reduced to \$253,500 then the scope and frequency of sampling will be reduced by approximately 35%. Without funding, samples will not be collected.

*Alternative Funding:* California Senate Bill (SB) 482 will provide funding to support continued ocean water monitoring along the California coastline. SB 482 has recently been chaptered, and should provide sufficient local funding for at least the next three years. , The State has not yet finalized the allocation of funds per SB 482 to local jurisdictions. If additional funding is needed, EH will seek funding from local beach cities and the Department of Beaches and Harbors.

### **Inspection of Detention Facilities**

*Description:* The County is required to conduct annual evaluations of County and city detention facilities to assess compliance with State standards dealing with medical care, nutrition, and environmental health. These detention facilities include jails, court holding facilities, and juvenile halls and camps.

*Current Annual Workload:* Approximately 150 detention facilities receive an annual inspection. Average inspection time is 20 hours per facility.

*Current level of funding:* \$ 297,000 (3 positions)

*Proposed Program Changes:* The State Correctional Standards Authority (CSA) reviews conditions and operating practices within detention facilities based on the inspections by DPH. Currently, DPH is working with the CSA, and the Departments of Probation and Sheriff to achieve timely compliance within detention facilities. To improve the efficiency and effectiveness of this program, DPH is implementing several changes focused on staff training and accountability, and better scheduling to ensure timely inspection and reporting.

*Result:* Detention facility inspections will continue to be conducted and alternative funding must be found,

*Alternative Funding:* EH will seek funding from the County Courts, and the Departments of Probation and Sheriff to offset the costs of inspections at County detention facilities. DPH is also pursuing agreements for funding the inspection of detention facilities in 38 contract cities.

### **Specialized Complaints**

*Description:* Complaints regarding air quality, including indoor air quality, typically involve the investigation of mold, asbestos, radon, and/or other air contaminants. This work requires the use of air sampling equipment by an industrial hygienist and may be on either private or public property. Another common specialized complaint involves noise concerns typically involving allegations of excessive noise from residential, industrial, or commercial locations. These complaints are investigated to enforce the County Noise Ordinance or otherwise evaluate community noise exposures.

*Current Annual Workload:* Approximately 320 investigations, each averaging 9.4 hours for a total of 3,008 hours.

*Current level of funding:* \$ 210,000 (2 field positions)

*Proposed Program Changes:* EH has historically provided service in response to air quality and noise concerns from the public. This service is unique to Los Angeles County. EH will focus complaint response on those indoor air quality complaints suggesting a significant potential impact on public health. Regarding enforcement of the County Noise Ordinance, EH will place a greater burden on industries subject to the ordinance for necessary noise monitoring, and will also seek reimbursement from such entities for DPH's oversight costs. With these changes, it is estimated that annual costs can be reduced by 75% from \$210,000 to \$72,000.

*Results:* If funding is reduced to \$72,000 then EH would be able to conduct 210 inspections. Without funding, no inspections will be conducted.

*Alternative Funding:* EH will seek to recover costs from non-compliant property owners or others who may have an interest in supporting DPH's efforts to assess and resolve a pending complaint.

If you should have any questions or need additional information, please let me know.

JEF:sa  
PH:1103:001

c: Chief Executive Officer  
County Counsel  
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors