

September 12, 2023

MOTION BY SUPERVISOR LINDSEY P. HORVATH

“Protecting Santa Monica Bay and LA County Beaches from Trash and Pollution”

Los Angeles County’s world-renowned beaches are iconic and fundamental to our identity as a region. Our 75-mile coastline has been immortalized in film and media and attracts some 70 million day-visits annually. Oceanic tourism and recreation contribute tens of thousands of jobs and \$2.2 billion to our local economy and fishing provides an important source of food to thousands of Angelenos. In a County where millions live in park-poor neighborhoods, they are an essential public resource offering access to the water, nature, and recreation. This is especially true for the estimated two million Angelenos considered highly vulnerable to extreme heat.

On August 20th, 2023, Los Angeles County was hit by Tropical Storm Hilary, a rare summer storm and the first of its kind to strike Los Angeles in decades. While on many accounts our County fared well due to prudent planning and emergency coordination, our beaches were hit with significant debris flush and trash accumulation. Across our coastline, and especially on the central coast around Venice and Dockweiler Beaches, an excessive and unacceptable quantity of pollution and debris entered our waterways and washed up onshore, impacting the public’s ability to recreate during the peak summer season, and harming our vibrant marine ecosystem. This was in addition to elevated bacterial levels which are a persistent challenge for all beaches after intense rain events.

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Where does the trash and other pollution come from in the first place?

The debris that washed up after the “first flush” storm of the season consisted of two main sources: natural debris (e.g. brush, foliage) and human-generated trash. Especially during the first major storm of the season, human-made trash and other pollution including oil, pesticides, and pathogens that are recklessly dumped on our streets, get washed into our waterways and eventually into Santa Monica Bay. This debris also includes organic matters that dries up during the summer, gets dislodged from the natural environment, and though this material may be unpleasant to manage, it does not present the same environmental risks.

Unfortunately, our economy is overly reliant on single-use (largely plastic) items and too many of our residents and visitors do not properly dispose of their waste. Nonprofit Heal the Bay reports that the most common items that wash up onto beaches are cigarette butts, food wrappers, plastic bottle caps, and PPE masks (a new phenomenon brought by the pandemic). Plastic producers, as well as individuals must take responsibility for their own waste and litter, switch to reusable items, and support businesses that embrace reusable items. Our economy must transition away from harmful disposable products and towards reusable alternatives to reduce harmful pollution.

The Board of Supervisors has taken several actions to address upstream generation of single use waste. Regulations passed in recent years include policies to restrict single use plastic straws (which are now much less commonly washed up on beaches), plastic bags, foodware accessories, expanded polystyrene and other single use plastic foodware. These

policies are at different stages of implementation and address the most ubiquitous forms of litter - all of which have reusable alternatives.

How does the pollution get from our streets to our beaches?

LA County Public Works, on behalf of the Flood Control District (FCD), operates a flood control system consisting of 483 miles of channels and 3,240 miles of storm drains countywide, which is used to divert water away from streets and property and avoid damage and hazards from flooding, in conjunction with municipal partners whose streets and storm drain systems integrate into the County's infrastructure. This infrastructure is very effective at quickly moving stormwater runoff and keeping communities safe. But, unlike our sewer system whose contents are treated before going into the ocean, stormwater is directly carried out to the Pacific Ocean, through regional waterways such as the Los Angeles River, San Gabriel River, Dominguez Channel, and Ballona Creek. Trash that enters the flood control system can be carried with stormwater runoff to the Pacific Ocean. Once the trash is washed out into the ocean, it tends to circulate in the coastal tides over the course of a week or two, impacting marine wildlife before ultimately washing up on beaches with each high tide.

Automatic retractable screens and connector pipe screens have been installed by the County and cities on numerous catch basins. The devices are designed to keep larger trash and debris on the streets and out of the flood channels. During dry weather, these devices are very effective at keeping trash out of the flood control channels and where municipalities have an obligation to frequently clean them. During storm events, those screens automatically open wider

to allow greater conveyance of water off the street, but any debris which is caught in them or still on the street will likely get washed into the flood channels and eventually out to sea.

Most municipalities throughout LA County operate under Municipal Separate Storm Sewer System (MS4) Permits, a part of compliance with the Clean Water Act. These permits define responsibilities for managing waterways and establish Total Maximum Daily Loads for various pollutants, including trash, bacteria, and metals. This means that cities throughout LA County must legally meet targets surrounding management of trash on the streets and ensure it is frequently disposed of (e.g. regular street cleaning) and catch basin devices are inspected and cleaned often enough so that trash does not wash into waterways. Local governments, and not just the County, must do a better job at removing trash from streets before it can enter the County's flood control infrastructure and pollute the ocean.

To address trash that has made it into the flood control system, the FCD places booms at ten strategic locations in waterways, including in the Ballona Creek and LA River to skim trash floating on the surface. The Flood Control District is also piloting an innovative Trash Interceptor at Ballona Creek, which is under a two-year pilot. Since its deployment in October 2022, the Ballona Creek Trash Interceptor Pilot Project has prevented several tons of trash and debris from reaching the Santa Monica Bay and local beaches. However, the Interceptor has deployment constraints and cannot reasonably be expected to serve as a panacea, particularly on days with heavy water flows.

Public Works further supplements these efforts by administering a public education and

outreach program and by implementing multi-benefit stormwater improvement projects which reduce trash and many other pollutants.

How Do We Clean Up After a Storm, and How Can We Improve?

After a storm, the Department of Beaches and Harbors (DBH) assesses the state of its critical facilities, the conditions of beaches, and then deploys a tiered cleanup protocol, first and foremost prioritizing public safety. Beach cleanups are performed using a combination of heavy equipment and manually operated rakes, depending on the availability of equipment and operational conditions. DBH must also take into consideration the impacts of their operations on marine life. For example, Tropical Storm Hilary struck at the end of the grunion mating season, and before using any heavy equipment, the Department had to confirm with biologists where this federally protected endangered species was active to minimize its risk of harm. All these efforts are improved by partnership with non-profit, academic, community, and business groups focused on stewardship of our waterways and beaches.

Los Angeles County is not alone in facing these challenges, and keeping our beaches and waterways clean and safe from trash and debris is already a high priority for Public Works, the Department of Beaches and Harbors, and the entire County. Considering a changing climate, more intense and less predictable storm events, and access to our beaches being more important than ever due to extreme heat, it is worth evaluating the County's ability to improve upon our current strategies and protocols, especially considering this coming season's expected El Niño conditions.

I, THEREFORE, MOVE that the Board of Supervisors instruct the Department of Public Works to report back with within 90 days on the following:

1. Protocols in place before and during a wet weather event to mitigate trash flows.
2. How DPW complies with trash total maximum daily loads (TMDL) limits and whether they are implementing all actions identified in the TMDL and watershed management plans to address trash.
3. Additional protocols that could be developed to mitigate trash flows on the streets (e.g. extra street sweeping, clearing out certain channels, storm drains, or catch basins in advance of storms, strategic placement of additional trash receptacles in high trash areas, coordinated education campaigns across jurisdictions, community science/crowd sourced campaigns to identify areas in need of cleaning out or repair).
4. Whether existing data can identify where our trash is coming from in terms of specific communities and types of sources, or whether DPW can undertake such assessments to better target trash reduction efforts.
5. Impacts of climate change on the effectiveness of existing infrastructure given the intensity of rain and accumulated debris flows.
6. Effectiveness of the Ballona Creek Trash Interceptor Pilot Project.
7. Additional innovations that could be deployed within Flood Control District infrastructure to capture trash and debris without undermining the critical flood control objectives (e.g. strategies to capture debris outflows).

8. Resources needed to deploy or pilot new strategies.
9. How Public Works collaborates with partner jurisdictions and non-governmental organizations to reduce trash and whether these efforts can be enhanced.
10. Policies needed from partner jurisdictions adjacent to flood or sewer infrastructure (e.g. cleaning protocols or deployment of infrastructure) and with the assistance of County Counsel, what authority the County has to mandate those protocols outside of unincorporated areas?

I, FURTHER, MOVE that the Department of Beaches and Harbors report back within 90 days on the following:

1. Which beaches fare worst in terms of trash accumulation, and with the assistance of Public Works, why that is the case.
2. Recommended protocols that could be implemented in advance of a storm event to prevent trash entering the ocean (e.g. increased frequency of servicing trash barrels and restrooms).
3. Protocols to clean debris from beaches after a wet weather event and how the Department prioritizes clean up when multiple beaches face needs.
4. When and how heavy equipment can be used for beach clean ups and a discussion of relevant operational safety and wildlife conservation considerations.
5. With the assistance of County Counsel, responsibilities of incorporated municipalities for maintenance and cleanup of beach and beach-adjacent facilities and whether the County has authority to mandate any protocols outside of unincorporated areas.

6. Which resources are most lacking (i.e. equipment and human resources) in response to a large storm preparation and clean up, and with the assistance of the Chief Executive Office, whether relevant County resources could be deployed from other departments (e.g. Fire, Public Works, Internal Services, Parks and Recreation) to achieve a swifter and more impactful response?
7. Feasibility of engaging partners such as the Conservation Corps for cleanup efforts that would have secondary workforce development and environmental education benefits.
8. Resources needed to deploy or pilot new strategies.

I, FURTHER, MOVE that Public Works, with the assistance of the Chief Sustainability Office, report back within 90 days on the following:

1. An update on the implementation of the County's enforcement of illegal dumping, single use plastics ordinances, and other laws that are designed to reduce the amount of littered single-use and bulky waste that contributes to beach trash.
2. Additional steps that could be taken that would aid in source control (e.g. trash reduction) including the potential to accelerate any deadlines from SB54 locally.
3. Opportunities to hold companies that are disproportionately responsible for (and profit from) plastics/trash pollution accountable to assist with source reduction and/or limiting trash from entering storm drains and waterways.

I, FURTHER, MOVE that the Office of Emergency Management report back to the Board in 90 days on its protocols for informing the Departments of Public Works, Beaches and Harbors, and all Los Angeles County municipalities regarding large storm events so that

they can plan accordingly and implement the best practice policies described here.

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