



## King County

### Wastewater Treatment Division

Department of Natural Resources and Parks

King Street Center

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**Subject: Response Letter from Christie True on behalf of King County Executive Ron Sims**

Thank you for taking the time to express your concerns related to King County's West Point Treatment Plant and the facility's National Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit renewal process. Ron Sims, King County Executive, has asked me to respond on his behalf. I appreciate the opportunity to respond to the issues you raise, and to tell you more about the beneficial programs and services provided by King County's clean-water utility.

The West Point facility is a cornerstone in King County's efforts to protect public health and the environment by conveying and treating the wastewater generated by residents and businesses in our region. Before this plant came online in 1966, wastewater flowed largely untreated into Puget Sound and Lake Washington, sullyng local beaches and making swimming and fishing a health hazard.

Each day, King County's West Point Treatment Plant performs the following:

- Treats about 100 million gallons of wastewater generated by people in our region when they flush toilets, take showers, wash clothes or run a garbage disposal.
- Improves water quality by using advanced processes to treat wastewater to a higher level than other conventional secondary treatment plants.
- Treats urban stormwater runoff from the service area in addition to wastewater, which would otherwise flow untreated into Puget Sound and Lake Washington.
- Creates resources from the wastewater it treats. Every year, West Point reclaims 195 million gallons of water for irrigation and treatment processes, produces 0.8 million kilowatt hours of electricity, and about 46,000 wet tons of high-quality biosolids that benefit soils and crops in Eastern and Western Washington.

West Point Treatment Plant won a Platinum Peak Performance Award in 2007 from the National Association of Clean Water Agencies. This prestigious award is given to facilities that achieve five consecutive years of 100 percent compliance with effluent limits in their respective NPDES permits. While this compliance record reflects King County's support of regional efforts to clean up Puget Sound and protect our quality of life, we continue to pursue ways to improve the treatment process, reduce discharge into water bodies, and protect Puget Sound.

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In addition to the award-winning wastewater treatment at our West Point plant, King County's Wastewater Treatment Division manages several programs to protect water quality by reducing pollutants entering the wastewater stream, controlling combined sewer overflows, and reducing effluent discharges to the Puget Sound.

Our scientists and environmental engineers continually follow the latest scientific analysis regarding the presence of chemicals, pharmaceuticals, nutrients and heavy metals in the environment. Our division works closely with the Department of Ecology when confirmed research findings translate into regulations affecting wastewater treatment and discharge. The importance of controlling these substances at the source, before they enter the waste stream, has become increasingly apparent and is usually more cost effective than relying on treatment plants.

We also operate an Industrial Waste Program which works with businesses and industries across the region to ensure they meet stringent discharge limitations for their wastewater before it enters our system and to educate them about pollution prevention, waste reduction, and water reuse. One example of success is our Dental Waste program, which has effectively kept about 375 pounds of mercury out of the environment since 2003. This program was the first of its kind in the United States and is considered as a model to be used by other cities. The Industrial Waste employees also work on source control, inspecting and monitoring businesses and industries throughout the county.

We have also continued the work we began in 1979 to control combined sewer overflows, or CSOs, which occur in older parts of Seattle when stormwater from heavy rains puts some sewer pipes at or over capacity. King County's Combined Sewer Overflow Reduction program has resulted in a 60-70 percent reduction in uncontrolled CSOs since the early 1980s. In 2005, we completed work on two CSO storage and treatment facilities at Mercer/Elliott West and Henderson/MLK/Norfolk and we have plans to begin construction on at least four additional CSO control projects over the next five years. We have plans to build another 16 CSO control projects after that. This plan is expected to cost well over \$400 million. We are analyzing CSO quality and sediments in compliance with our permit.

King County also supports efforts to encourage wastewater utilities to reduce the volume of effluent discharges. For more than a decade, King County has been reusing highly treated wastewater for irrigation and industrial processes at our treatment plants. We are currently working on a Reclaimed Water Comprehensive Plan that will examine the use of reclaimed water for beneficial purposes and reduce reliance on Puget Sound for the discharge of highly treated effluent.

It is important to understand that one agency cannot solve the problems affecting water quality in Puget Sound. As you are aware, and as the Puget Sound Partnership has emphasized, the problems facing Puget Sound are complex and threats come from many sources. King County recognizes that the West Point Treatment Plant is one of the largest sources of treated wastewater in Puget Sound, and we are proud of our record of meeting water quality standards. King County will continue to pursue

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ways to help protect our most precious resource, guided by sound science, in addition to fully complying with state and federal regulations.

You can find more information about the West Point Treatment Plant and what you can do to help us protect water quality by visiting our Web site at <http://www.kingcounty.gov/wtd/>.

Of course, we also encourage people to learn more about the West Point NPDES permit process by visiting Ecology's Web site at <http://www.ecy.wa.gov/>. I understand Ecology is scheduling a public hearing on the West Point NPDES permit, and information should be available soon on that Web site.

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to your concerns. Please do not hesitate to contact me at 206-684-1236 if I may be of any assistance.

Christie True  
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Wastewater Treatment Division  
King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks