

Clean Water, Clean Beaches FAQs

A brief set of frequently asked questions and answers

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About the Measure

Q. What is the Clean Water, Clean Beaches Measure?

A. The Clean Water, Clean Beaches Measure, if passed by voters, would provide funding for pollution prevention and cleaning up rivers, creeks, lakes beaches and coastal waters in Los Angeles County. It would also fund projects to capture stormwater, which can then be held, filtered, and cleansed naturally as it seeps down into the ground. It can later be pumped up, and after further treatment, be used for drinking water. This would increase local drinking water supplies and reduce the need for imported water from Northern California and the Colorado River. There is more information on the Clean Water, Clean Beaches Program website: www.LACountyCleanWater.org

Q. What led to this Measure?

A. The 1972 Clean Water Act established the basic structure for regulating pollutants discharged into the waters of the United States. The Clean Water Act has been challenged in the courts and upheld; it is the law.

In California, water quality in waterways is regulated by the State Water Resources Control Board (Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board).

Almost all water bodies in Los Angeles County do not meet water quality standards and are listed as impaired under the federal Clean Water Act. Since 1999, cities and unincorporated areas in the Los Angeles region have been subject to a federal Consent Decree that established a 13-year schedule for figuring out how to clean up the water.

There are currently more than 30 different pollutant regulations (TMDLs) in Los Angeles County (for pollutants such as trash, bacteria, metals, pesticides and fertilizers). Cities and the County could face a \$25,000 fine each day for each pollutant found to violate the clean water regulations. This Measure will provide a dedicated funding source to cities to meet the regulations without having to take money from a city's general fund.

Q. Can you cite exact projects that would be funded?

A. The Clean Water, Clean Beaches Program website, www.LACountyCleanWater.org includes a map with prototype and proposed projects that would be funded through this measure. Computer modeling of about 2,000 sub-watersheds determines where pollutants are occurring, the severity of each problem, the best type of clean-up project and the best location to place the project to mitigate pollution.

Q. I'm already doing things to retain stormwater on my property. Can I get a rebate?

- A. There will be an appeals and rebate process for property owners. If you believe there's an error in the size of your parcel or your land use (residential, commercial, etc.), or if you have put measures in place to retain and treat stormwater onsite, you can contact the Flood Control District. *There will be more information about this on the website in the coming weeks.*

In addition, many cities and county unincorporated communities have rebate programs for installing rain barrels, reducing impervious areas or other stormwater retaining measures. Property owners will need to document that they've installed on-site measures. You'll need to check with your City.

Q. If this measure doesn't pass, what will happen?

- A. If the Measure doesn't pass, the County and municipalities will have to continue to allocate general funds that are earmarked for other essential public services to be used for required water quality improvements.

Q. How will the funds from the water quality fee be distributed?

- A. Ninety (90) percent of the funds collected will be distributed to the cities and unincorporated communities of the County and ten (10) percent to the Flood Control District to provide water quality monitoring, research and development, technical assistance, planning, oversight and administration.

Q. How will the funds from the water quality fee be spent?

- A. The funds collected from the water quality fee will be spent only for local and regional projects that meet the criteria established in the Program Elements document including but not limited to: (a) the water quality project must demonstrate the ability to provide and sustain long-term water quality benefits; (b) that the water quality project is based on generally accepted scientific and engineering principles; (c) and the project must be designed and located to maximize the water quality benefits.

Q. Can the funds be used for something else other than water quality?

- A. No. By law, all funds raised by the Measure must be used for local projects and programs that improve water quality. Some of these projects could provide additional benefits such as enhancing local drinking water supplies.

Q. What type of accountability and oversight will be in place?

- A. All revenue collection and expenditures would be subject to independent annual financial and performance audits. In addition, an oversight committee will be established to ensure long-term project and program effectiveness.

About the Public Hearing

Q. Why did you send a Notice and why are you holding a Hearing?

- A. The California Constitution requires that before a fee can be established all property owners must be notified by mail of a Public Hearing regarding the fee. The Hearing will be January 15, 2013. You can attend the Public Hearing to say whether you approve or oppose the proposed Clean Water Fee. If a majority of property owners submit a written protest, then the fee cannot be established through the next step, which is an election. If a majority does not object, the next step is an election to determine if it can be imposed.

Q. If not enough people object, will I be charged the fee?

- A. No. The next step, if the Board decides to proceed, will be a vote. No fee can be established without a vote.

Q. If I support the fee, should I do anything?

- A. You do not need to do anything right now, although you are welcome to send a letter of support to the address in your Notice or come to the Public Hearing on January 15, 2013. If the Board decides to proceed with a vote, you will then receive a ballot and may cast a vote.

Q. Will the Board decide on January 15, 2013, whether to proceed to a vote?

- A. No, the Board will decide after all the protest letters and forms are collected and counted (they may be submitted until the end of the Public Hearing on January 15, 2013). The Board may decide whether to proceed in February 2013.

About the Voting Process

Q. How does the voting process work?

- A. If the Board of Supervisors votes to proceed, a ballot vote would be held. The type of ballot, mail ballot or general election has not yet been decided. For a mail ballot, all property owners would receive a ballot in the mail. You would be asked to vote on the fee and send back the ballot. Property owners do not need to be registered voters to participate. Voters are asked to sign their ballots to verify they are authorized to cast a vote on behalf of the property. There is one vote per property, regardless of the size of the property.

Californians required this property owner-based method of voting, now Article 13D of the California Constitution, by passing Proposition 218 (The Right To Vote on Taxes Act) in a 1996 Statewide election.

About Stormwater

Q. What is stormwater?

- A. Stormwater in LA County— also called urban runoff—is rainwater plus everything else the rain carries along with it. Sometimes that includes pollution, bacteria and trash. Stormwater flows into storm drains and into waterways, such as lakes, rivers, creeks and the ocean. Stormwater is not currently treated or cleaned before it flows directly into waterways. Urban runoff is the main source of pollution to California's coastline—according to recent water quality tests, 7 of the 10 most polluted beaches in California are on the Los Angeles County coast.

Q. What is a watershed?

- A. It is an area of land that drains to the same body of water, such as a river, lake, or the ocean. When it rains, the water runs down streets, into storm drains, and into the same waterbody.

Q. How do pollutants get in the water?

- A. Pollutants come from the stuff that's left in our streets, like trash and plastics. It also comes from fertilizers and pesticides used in gardens, soap from washing cars, motor oil that drips from cars, and anything that gets dumped into stormdrains, which drain into our waterways. You can find a lot more information on the website: www.LACountyCleanWater.org

Q. How do toxic metals get in the water?

- A. They can come from many different sources. For example, when you apply the brakes on a car, the brake pads are worn away and metal dust particles are left on the road. When it rains, that dust is washed into waterways. As tires wear out, they deposit similar dust on and around the roadways and they are another source of trace metals. You'll find more information on the website: www.LACountyCleanWater.org

Q. I thought the water is treated before it goes to the ocean?

- A. No, stormwater and urban runoff are not treated. There are actually two water systems. One is the wastewater system that carries water in sewers from your house to treatment facilities, and then to the ocean. The other is the storm drain system that carries rain and excess water from watering gardens or washing cars. Even though it doesn't rain much here, when it does rain water runs down streets and into storm drains. The water then flows to waterways, like the LA River, San Gabriel River, and Ballona Creek. And from there it goes directly to the ocean. There's a video on our website that explains this www.LACountyCleanWater.org

Q. How long has the water quality in stormwater runoff been a problem?

- A. In its natural state, hundreds of years ago, open space in the LA area would absorb most rainwater into the ground, which gets naturally filtered and cleansed as it percolates down into the groundwater. That underground water could then be pumped up for drinking (after further treatment), irrigation and other uses. Over the years, urban development, to address economic growth and an increased population, has added hard surfaces such as asphalt and concrete. That now results in water rushing along streets, picking up trash and pollution as it flows, and depleting groundwater available to be used for drinking water.

Q. Isn't most pollution caused by industry—are they paying this fee too?

- A. Industrial and commercial properties would pay the fee too. Industrial and commercial properties tend to have more paved surfaces, like buildings and parking lots, than residential properties do. Their fee would be based on that more intense type of land usage. If you'd like more details, there is an Engineers Report that shows how fees are calculated in the Information Center on the website: www.LACountyCleanWater.org

About the Fee

Q. Who would pay this fee?

- A. All property owners—including commercial, industrial, residential, and government—will pay the fee at different rates based on the amount of runoff generated on their parcel(s). There are about 2.3 million properties affected.

Q. This seems like a tax; what is the difference between a fee and a tax?

- A. The proposed clean water fee is a property-based fee for a service received by that property. In this case, the service is managing the pollutants generated by the water runoff from that property.

A tax is a charge on an individual or business that pays for governmental services or facilities that benefit the public broadly. Example of taxes include property tax, sales tax, business license tax, hotel occupancy tax, and utility user's tax. There doesn't need to be a direct relationship between how much tax a person pays and how much service he or she receives from government.

A property-related fee can only be charged to property owners for providing a service directly related to that property. In this case, properties send water runoff into the storm drain system, which flows into lakes, rivers and coastal waters. The fee is to improve the quality of water in the storm drain system and those water bodies. The fee is based on the size of a parcel and how much of it is developed, which relates to how much polluted water runoff it causes.

Q. Once the fee goes into effect, can it be raised?

- A. No. If the Fee is approved in an election, by law the fee rate can never be raised, unless there is another vote to raise it.

Q. Why do school districts pay the fee? Districts do not have the money; this would harm schools.

- A. At a minimum, the ordinance will include provisions to provide funding, in the same amount paid by each district, directly back to schools for curriculum and materials about water and water quality, classroom science teachers, and/or to implement school water quality projects. The ordinance will also include provisions for school districts to receive additional funds for maintenance for capital water quality projects (for example, maintenance funds for retrofitting a dilapidated sports field with new turf that better allows stormwater to sink into the ground). *There will be more information on this on the website in the coming weeks.*

Q. I think my city is already doing this. This shouldn't apply to me.

- A. This is a measure for all properties in the Los Angeles County Flood Control District and would provide funding to cities. This Countywide fee would supplement any local efforts currently established by your city. You'll need to check with your city about what measure may already be in place and how the funds are used.

Q. How will the fee be collected?

- A. It would be placed on your property tax bill and collected annually by the County Treasurer, beginning with the 2013-1014 property tax bills.

Q. How was the fee determined?

- A. The fee will be determined by the amount of water runoff that properties generate, based on the size of each parcel (but not its value) and its land classification (e.g. residential, commercial, institutional, or undeveloped), and the corresponding percentage of hard impermeable surfaces.

Properties that are developed have hard surfaces such as asphalt and concrete that cause water runoff. The fee is based on the amount of stormwater runoff that these properties send to the storm drain system and, therefore, create the need to control and treat that runoff. Properties would pay in proportion to the amount of runoff they contribute.

Q. What will the typical residential household pay?

- A. 87% of homeowners would pay \$54 a year or less. Typical condos would pay \$20 or less. No single-family homeowner would pay more than \$82.

Q. How much would typical commercial/industrial parcels pay?

- A. 75% of commercial parcels would pay less than \$420 per year. Fees vary based on the size of the property and its use—how much it is developed with hard surfaces like parking lots that can't absorb rain. For example:
- Typical convenience store or fast food restaurant (10,000 sq. ft. parcel): \$250 per year
 - Typical "big box" or home improvement store (10 acres): \$11,000 per year

Q. Why does the Flood Control District exclude portions of the Antelope Valley?

- A. There is a mountain range that creates a border—properties in the Antelope Valley drain in a different direction, not into LA County waterways. So they do not contribute to the pollution in the LA County waterways.

Q. Who will make the final determination on the proposed fee?

- A. Property owners will. While the LA County Board of Supervisors will decide whether to put the issue to a vote of LA County property owners, property owners themselves will vote to decide whether all properties in the District will pay the fee. Only those who would be required to pay the fee will be able to directly vote on it.

Q. Once the fee goes into effect, is it forever?

- A.** The Fee will be assessed permanently to ensure availability of funding to operate and maintain the water quality infrastructure, projects, and programs that will be implemented through the revenue. The Board of Supervisors may consider a clause to end the fee after a specific amount of time. That has not yet been decided.

For more information, please:

- Visit the website at: www.LACountyCleanWater.org
- Or email wqfi.info@dpw.lacounty.gov
- Or call (800) 218-0018, Monday through Thursday, 8am–5pm. For Spanish, call (626) 458-6981