

June 15, 2000

Julie Roth, Executive Director  
DSCSOC

Dear Julie:

Recently, Brian Oatman, UCD Manager of Environmental Protection, Environmental Health & Safety, has provided the UCD DOE LEHR national Superfund site RPMs with his version of the discussions at the Technical Advisory Committee meeting of the Putah Creek and Cache Creek CVRWQCB water quality (aquatic life toxicity) study. Unfortunately, as has repeatedly occurred in the past, Mr. Oatman has failed to reliably report on issues. Mr. Oatman was not at the TAC meeting and relied on Mr. D. Phillips as his source of information. Both you and I were present at the meeting. Presented below are comments on some of the inadequate and unreliable information provided by Mr. Oatman (Mr. Phillips).

Mr. Oatman stated,

*“Biologists from the Regional Board were absolutely amazed by the results from this study, in that almost no toxicity was found in either Putah Creek or Cache Creek over the entire 18-month period samples were collected. In other studies, they routinely see 100% toxicity nearly all the time at all locations.”*

Mr. Oatman did not report on the discussions at the TAC meeting on why the “Creeks” failed to show toxicity. As was discussed, this was likely due to the fact that most of the sampling of the Creeks was done during non-runoff events. It is my experience that typically non-runoff waters in the Central Valley and Orange County are non-toxic. However, sampling of runoff and creeks/rivers during runoff events shows aquatic life toxicity. There was agreement by the TAC that future sampling of these Creeks should focus on runoff events. It is highly likely that the pattern of toxicity found in other areas will also be found in the Creeks during runoff events.

Mr. Oatman stated,

*“One specific goal of this study was to determine if wastewater discharges from the UC Davis campus are negatively impacting Putah Creek. In a meeting last week, the TAC unanimously concluded that the UC Davis discharges are not negatively impacting the aquatic health of Putah Creek in any way.”*

This statement is highly inaccurate. First, only limited aspects of the potential impacts of UCD wastewater discharges to Putah Creek were studied. The failure to find aquatic life toxicity in the campus wastewater discharges with the limited sampling program conducted does not mean that there is no toxicity caused by this discharge. There could be constituents in the campus wastewater treatment plant discharges that, while not toxic at the time of sampling of the discharge, could become toxic downstream of the discharge, especially during low flow conditions. The period of sampling was during elevated flow (non-drought) conditions.

Toxicity in UCD wastewater discharges caused the CVRWQCB to put UCD on notice that this toxicity must be stopped. It appears from the results of the testing of the effluent over the past 18 months that UCD has tightened up the operation of its campus wastewater discharges so that, at least for now, it is not toxic to the organisms tested during the study period.

Mr. Oatman failed to discuss one of the most important aspects of the TAC meeting, namely that the TAC concluded that the UCD Aquatic Toxicity Laboratory failed to properly sample stormwater runoff from the LEHR site. At this time we still do not have reliable information on the toxicity of LEHR stormwater runoff.

Please pass these comments on to the RPMs, TAC, CVRWQCB and the SWRCB, indicating that if there are questions please contact me.

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