



ROSS VALLEY SANITARY DISTRICT

2960 Kerner Blvd
San Rafael, CA 94901
(415) 259-2949 ~ rvsd.org

More Information
Brett Richards
General Manager
(415) 259-2949

Ross Valley Sanitary District Discovers Major Damage to Larkspur Trunk Line - Repairs to Begin Immediately

Community Meeting Scheduled for Thursday, February 9

February 6, 2012. A sewer crew from Ross Valley Sanitary District, the 112-year-old sewer agency serving the Ross Valley, has discovered major damage to an 18-inch diameter trunk line running along Magnolia Avenue in Larkspur. The extent of the damage to the sewer pipe has prompted the District Board of Directors to declare an emergency so repair work can begin as soon as possible. A community meeting to discuss the repair and its potential impact on local residents and businesses has been scheduled for Thursday, February 9, at 7 pm at the new Twin Cities Police Station located at 250 Doherty Drive in Larkspur.

A District crew was marking utility locations when it discovered a major blockage in the system. In working to solve the problem, large pieces of broken pipe were found that were eventually traced back to the trunk line.

A close-circuit TV inspection of the trunk line that runs under the path alongside Magnolia Avenue between Bon Air Road and Doherty Drive indicates that a section of the pipe has collapsed and much of the pipe is deformed (oval instead of round), which is generally the last stage before collapse.

“Wastewater is still making its way through the damaged section of pipe despite the problem, however we must repair it immediately,” says Brett Richards, General Manager of Ross Valley Sanitary District. “We are fortunate that this was discovered before a major rain event as it is quite likely we could have had a major spill.”

In a unanimous vote by the Ross Valley Sanitary District Board of Directors, the lowest bid from four qualified contractors ranging from \$725,000 to \$1,389,000 for the emergency repair work

was accepted. Maggiora & Ghilotti, based in San Rafael, began repair work today and plan to complete the job within the next 60 to 90 days depending on weather conditions.

District staff has recently begun using its new state-of-the-art close-circuit TV (CCTV) system to inspect and map the Ross Valley sewer system. Over the last two months, the RVSD Board has been presented with images of 24 pipes that are severely damaged and will also need repair. These pipes have not been given an emergency status but their condition is serious enough that the District is actively soliciting bids for their repair.

“Our CCTV crew has only mapped about 20 percent of our pipes, but the damage we have discovered supports the grave assessment of the overall system that was made three years ago when I joined the District,” says Richards.

The District has estimated that as much as 85% of the community’s public sewer pipes are at or beyond their service lives, and these pipes have the potential to fail at any time. The District staff expects to present its Board with more urgent pipe repairs in the coming weeks as additional CCTV footage is acquired and analyzed.

“Decades of deferred pipe replacement that enabled low sewer rates are catching up with the Ross Valley community,” says Richards. “We have been putting more new pipe in the ground than any other Marin sewer agency, but it is still not enough to get this situation under control and prevent catastrophic failures in the system.”

Richards proposed to double the amount of pipe replaced each year from 2 miles to 4 miles in an April 2011 sewer rate workshop where he provided a solution to the community that would repair the entire system in 50 years. The necessary funding to meet his recommendation was scaled back by the RVSD Board in part due to strong public concern about raising sewer rates. The public also expressed interest in converting the District to a Flow-Based rate structure that considers the amount of fresh water used by customers to calculate their sewer rates.

“This trunk line failure and what we are discovering with our CCTV assessment is demonstrating to everyone that we are out of time and cannot put off fixing our system,” says Richards.

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The District Board of Directors was recently presented with 24 critical pipe problems, which can be viewed by downloading the Full Agenda Packets for meetings held on December 21, 2011 and January 25, 2012. Visit www.rvsd.org then go to the Meetings page where you will find the Agenda and Minutes Archive link.