



PUBLIC AFFAIRS

Government Affairs Report

Prepared for the
South Orange County Wastewater Authority Board of Directors

September 28th, 2026

COUNTY OF ORANGE:

- The OC Stormwater Program -

In September, the Board of Supervisors approved the Amended and Restated National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System Stormwater Permit Implementation Agreement. This program is a collaborative effort between the County of Orange, the Orange County Flood Control District and the 34 cities of Orange County, to carry out MS4 permit requirements. The Program is administered through an implementation agreement, and this amendment updates the governance, project-specific cost-sharing and administrative framework for the OC Stormwater Program to reflect current municipal stormwater permit requirements.

- Herbicide use in Orange County-

The herbicide controversy continues to grow and has attracted the attention of an increasing number of Orange County residents and people across the country. The organizations most active in this issue are significantly expanding the scope of their investigation. The wider scope now includes several factors. These include additional chemicals, specifically pesticides, and has grown from two South Orange County creeks to all waterways, watersheds and water production, conveyance, storage and treatment facilities and operations in the County. The focus of discussion has moved from the County Public Works department to water districts, sanitation districts, HOAs, cities, private water companies and regional agencies.

- Operational Area Emergency Operations Center-

On September 11th, the County of Orange officially activated its Operational Area Emergency Operations Center (County/OA EOC) following increasing coastal storm and

weather damage including severe coastal erosion, high surf, and damage to homes and public infrastructure. These storm impacts triggered local emergency proclamations in both Dana Point and Laguna Beach. The activation allows the County to manage the incident as a regional emergency rather than through separate department responses.

The County is required by California's Standardized Emergency Management System to activate the Operational Area Emergency Operations Center when two cities proclaim local emergencies. This activation provides a centralized structure and brings emergency management personnel and County departments together to coordinate information, resources, damage assessments, mutual aid, and support for affected cities.

- **County of Orange Local Emergency Proclamation-**

On September 17, 2026, the County of Orange proclaimed a local emergency in response to the ongoing coastal impacts related to Hurricane Marie. Several coastal Orange County cities requested that the County proclaim a Local Emergency. The County has the authority and responsibility to proclaim local emergencies in its capacity as the Operational Area (OA) and in support of the needs of affected communities. This proclamation is justified by the local emergency proclamations in both Dana Point and Laguna Beach, the impacts of Hurricane Marie and concerns about additional damage that may be caused by the anticipated stronger than normal El Niño this winter.

- **Coastal Treatment Plant Access Road-**

Orbis Public Affairs continues to work with SOCWA and OC Parks staff to develop a mutually beneficial amendment to the existing agreements. These amendments are intended to address changes in the uses and conditions of the road and associated improvements. Last week we participated in a productive Zoom call with SOCWA and OC Parks staff and will continue to facilitate ongoing dialogue and provide strategic planning and guidance.

ORANGE COUNTY SANITATION DISTRICT (OC San):

- **State of OC San-**

On September 18th, the State of OC San event was held at the OC San headquarters building in Fountain Valley. The keynote speaker was Troy Edgar, Deputy Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Deputy Secretary serves as the chief operating officer and manages the day-to-day operations of the Department. With DHS has an annual budget of \$100 billion and supports over 260,000 employees.

The Deputy Secretary previously served as the Department's Chief Financial Officer, and as a Board member and Chair of OCSan and Councilmember and Mayor of Los Alamitos.

The focus of Deputy Secretary Edgars' remarks was cyber security. He focused specifically on the threats to water and wastewater agencies and the recent spate of successful cyber-attacks on public and private water and wastewater agencies.

METROPOLITAN WATER DISTRICT OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA (MET):

- Changes to the Coordinated Operating Agreement, Water Storage, Exchange and Delivery Agreement with MWDOC and IRWD-

The Met Board approved amendments to make IRWD's new Kern Fan Project eligible for storage, include transfers that IRWD obtains to qualify as Program Water, and to allow IRWD's banked water managed under the COA to be eligible for transfers to other Metropolitan member agencies. Additionally, several outdated and unclear agreement provisions were updated and clarified, including provisions relating to the storage of Program Water in IRWD's Stockdale Ranch project, eligible sources of water, financial responsibility for DWR fees associated with the delivery of Program Water, and the repayment of borrowed water.

- Adel Hagekhalil v. Metropolitan Water District of Southern California-

Authorized an increase in the maximum amount payable under contract for legal services with Davis Wright Tremaine LLP in the amount of \$350,000 for a total amount not to exceed \$600,000.

ORANGE COUNTY WATER DISTRICT (OCWD):

- Basin Storage Update for Water Year 2025-26-

OCWD staff used the "full basin" benchmark to calculate that an accumulated overdraft of 162,000 acre-feet for all three primary aquifers (Shallow, Principal, and Deep) exists as of June 30, 2026. Accumulated overdraft is essentially the volume of "empty basin storage" that is available to fill with groundwater. This relates to a storage increase of 21,000 acre-feet for water year 2025-26.

MOULTON NIGUEL WATER DISTRICT (MNWD):

- The Regional Water Quality Control Board, San Diego Region Meeting-

The Regional Board held their September meeting onsite at the MNWD headquarters with video and teleconference options. The Board heard a number of different items including an update on MNWD's activities.

MNWD provided the Board with an overview of their current capital infrastructure projects, the OASIS direct potable reuse program, and their "Building a Leading Utility Ecosystem"

(BLUE) initiative. The BLUE initiative aims to use integrated siloed digital resources to identify optimization opportunities and provide a view of system performance.

Chapter 6 of the Regional Board's Practical Vision is to "Strategize to Achieve Resilient Local Water Supply" and focuses on how the Regional Board will use its authority to support water and wastewater agencies in achieving the goal of a resilient, reliable local water supply. In accordance with Chapter 6, the Regional Board believes that holding the meeting at MNWD headquarters supports this goal by increasing the Regional Board's awareness of MNWD's current and upcoming recycled water and potable reuse projects.

IRVINE RANCH WATER DISTRICT (IRWD):

- **Board Appointment-**

On September 17th the IRWD Board appointed Cindy L. Miller, PE to fill the Board of Directors Division 1 vacancy. This seat represents portions of Irvine, Lake Forest, Orange, and unincorporated Orange County. Director Miller will serve on the Board for the remainder of the Division 1 term, which runs through November 2028.

Director Miller is a licensed Professional Civil Engineer and UCI graduate with a BS degree in Civil Engineering. Professionally she works as the Vice President and Operations Manager for the engineering consulting firm Hazen and Sawyer, which focuses on serving public water and wastewater agencies. She has 32 years of experience planning, designing, delivering, and overseeing drinking and recycled water supply, treatment, storage, and conveyance projects throughout Southern California.

Setting her apart from the other applicants is Director Miller's extensive personal experience working on multiple IRWD projects. These projects include the Baker Water Treatment Plant, Wells 21 and 22 Desalter, Northwood Zone 3 and Zone C and Whiting Ranch Zone 9 reservoirs and pipelines.

OTHER RELEVANT ITEMS:

- **Nationwide Water and Wastewater Agency Cyber Attacks-**

Since July 2026, cyberattacks on private and municipal water and wastewater systems has increased dramatically. Attacks have targeted facilities in seven states, some of which have been successful. In Late August, foreign hackers targeted and manipulated equipment at two privately owned Colorado water utilities and two municipal water systems in New Jersey. The incidents involved vulnerable internet-exposed control systems, which temporarily limited operators' ability to monitor or manage them remotely. One attack resulted in altered pumping cycles and equipment settings and disabled remote access and alarms. A federal security agency said that internet-exposed

water systems were targeted, including programmable logic controllers. Cyber attackers have escalated from occasional probing to evaluating incident response capabilities in real time.

- **EL Nino and SOCWA Impacts-**

Anticipated severe El Nino conditions this winter may result in impacts around Dana Point including changes in the seabed, localized flooding and tidal surge into the San Juan Creek.

- **South Coast AQMD-**

The Governing Board had their September 10th Board Retreat at the Inn at the Mission San Juan Capistrano where they discussed a variety of matters including air quality monitoring using optical, drone, satellite and airborne methods, all of which can be used to monitor flares and generators.
