



Taking on the Bay's Industrial Polluters—and Winning

In 2013, Orcem Cement proposed building a cement plant and shipping terminal in Vallejo that would handle hazardous industrial materials. Baykeeper suspected that the facility could also be used to export toxic products like coal.

Storing coal on the Bay's shoreline can expose nearby communities to harmful coal dust. And when coal dust gets washed and blown into the Bay, it can also hurt wildlife.

That's why Baykeeper and our community partners watchdogged the facility's approval process, advocating for strict pollution limits at every step. This past June, in a victory for the Bay, the company called off the project.

What happens when Baykeeper requires polluters to stop contaminating the Bay... and they don't meet the mark?

And there's more. This spring, Baykeeper's scientists found that an industrial composting operation in Benicia called Vision Recycling had been illegally releasing harmful contaminants into Suisun Marsh. The marsh provides important habitat for native fish and wildlife in the North Bay.

Compost facilities provide an important service for reducing waste in landfills. But their runoff can contain harmful toxins that endanger the Bay.

So Baykeeper held Vision Recycling accountable under the Clean Water Act and required a cleanup plan. The company agreed to contain all of the facility's runoff and stop polluting Suisun Marsh.

But what happens when Baykeeper requires polluters to stop contaminating the Bay... and they don't meet the mark? We make them keep trying.

For years, steel fabricator SOS Steel in Santa Clara had been allowing toxic metals and chemicals to wash into the Guadalupe River, which flows to the Bay. Baykeeper investigated, and our attorneys required the company to reduce its contamination.


After their initial efforts didn't work, we required SOS Steel to install an advanced treatment system to remove pollutants before water runs off the site. SOS Steel's new pollution measures will reduce toxic industrial runoff, in another big win for the Bay. 



Photo: Steve Martarano, USFWS

At top: A view of a shoreline industrial facility captured on a Baykeeper aerial patrol (Photo by Robb Most).

Above: Suisun Marsh, which flows to the North Bay.



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Safeguarding San Francisco Bay from pollution since 1989.

Fall/Winter 2019

Letter From the Executive Director



Some people call us stubborn, and that's music to my ears. Tenacity is in Baykeeper's DNA. Even when it takes *years* of scientific investigation, advocacy, and legal action, our team sticks with it.

Throughout my 17 years at Baykeeper, I've witnessed the benefits of our perseverance against big problems and big polluters.

Take our campaign to stop sewage pollution. Since 2008, we've required sewer agencies in 20 cities to commit to major upgrades to keep millions of gallons of sewage pollution out of the Bay.

Our determined fight against industrial polluters is another example. Even after industrial facilities have signed

legally binding agreements to keep toxic pollution out of the Bay, Baykeeper monitors them for years to ensure they comply.

And over a decade ago, Baykeeper helped pass a new policy requiring power plants to phase out once-through cooling technology that killed fish. When this harmful technology recently reared its ugly head in the Bay again, we returned to the frontlines to stop the proposal.

I'm proud to be a part of Baykeeper because our unique brand of tenacity results in big wins for the Bay. And I'm grateful for your dedicated support to defend our beautiful Bay, too.

Sejal Choksi-Chugh, *Executive Director*

San Francisco Bay is Sick of Sewage

During the rainy season, millions of gallons of sewage are likely to pollute San Francisco Bay.

The main culprit is the Bay Area's dilapidated sewer systems. Crumbling pipes fill with rain water, causing leaks, ruptures, and spills into city streets, homes, and storm drains that connect to the Bay. When it rains, older treatment plants overflow, releasing partially treated sewage into the Bay.

Sewage in the Bay isn't just gross—it transmits viruses and bacteria that can cause rashes and infections in people who come in contact with contaminated water. It also harms the ecosystem by increasing the growth of toxic algae and depleting the oxygen in the water that fish need to breathe.

That's why Baykeeper launched a targeted campaign to hold cities accountable for sewage pollution.

We investigated Bay Area cities that were spilling large volumes of sewage into the Bay and its connected rivers and creeks. Then we required 20 cities to fix their systems and comply with the Clean Water Act.

So far 10—including San Carlos, Burlingame, and Millbrae—have completed their system upgrades and have significantly reduced sewage spills to the Bay.




Photo: Robb Most

A sewage and wastewater treatment plant in Oakland.

But other cities are making slower progress. We're closely monitoring Oakland, where the city signed a legal cleanup agreement with Baykeeper, the Regional Water Board, and EPA, but has so far failed to keep pace with the required sewer system upgrades. Richmond continues to have a large number of spills and recently signed a new agreement with Baykeeper to renovate their sewage system. And we're monitoring a number of other East Bay cities that have significant sewer spill problems that require long-term improvements.

Baykeeper will continue to watchdog cities around the Bay and advocate for infrastructure investments to prevent sewage spills.

"At the end of the day, cities are legally responsible for preventing sewage from getting into the Bay," Staff Attorney Nicole Sasaki says. "And if they don't measure up, we'll hold them accountable, because the Bay needs to be protected from this pollution." 

Help Stop Sewage Spills

Most people don't think about the Bay when cooking holiday meals. But every year, preparing delicious food has an impact on the Bay's health.

Rich holiday cooking uses a lot of butter, oils, and other fats. When rinsed down the drain, these fats harden and clog pipes, leading to backups and sewage spills.

The good news is that your Thanksgiving feasts and holiday treats don't have to cause problems for the Bay. **Just don't pour the fats—liquid or solid—down the drain.** Instead, dispose of drippings, creams, sauces, and oils in the compost or trash, or take large amounts to an oil recycling facility.

Learn more about local disposal guidelines at baykeeper.org/fats

Opposing Zombie Technology by the Bay

For decades, power plants along the San Francisco, Pittsburg, and Antioch shorelines used a harmful practice called once-through cooling.

Powerful pumps sucked in water from San Francisco Bay to cool down heated machinery. The process killed larvae and small fish and trapped larger fish. Then, when the heated water was dumped back into the Bay, it killed fish eggs and made the area too warm for some creatures to survive.

“It was like once-through cooling was a zombie coming back to life,” said Baykeeper Staff Attorney Ben Eichenberg.

So we forced the power plants to stop using this technology. In 2010, Baykeeper and other environmental groups got a big win for the Bay by successfully advocating for a statewide phaseout of once-through cooling.

But recently, a company called Nautilus Data Technologies proposed bringing back this outdated technology to cool down equipment at a new data center on the Bay’s Alameda shoreline.

“It was like once-through cooling was a zombie coming back to life,” said Baykeeper Staff Attorney Ben Eichenberg. “We knew we had to protect the Bay from this plan.”


Baykeeper’s scientists investigated and found that fish spawn and seals hunt near the proposed site. And just like the old power plants, the data center’s equipment would put these animals at risk. It could also alter the Bay’s natural currents and increase the spread of toxic algae.



Photo: Mike Baird, Flickr, CC

A harbor seal in the Bay. The technology called once-through cooling could harm the Bay’s fish and wildlife.

Baykeeper staff discussed these issues with company representatives and city officials, and submitted our concerns to the Alameda City Council. The Sierra Club, the Audubon Society, and many Alameda residents also objected to the project.

At a June city council meeting, Alameda’s mayor came out in opposition to the project, citing Baykeeper’s concerns. And the city council reversed its plan to approve the data center, instead unanimously rejecting it—ending the resurrection of this outdated technology and protecting the health of fish, wildlife, and the Bay. 

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**277 legal wins
to stop polluters**

**15,000 hours of boat patrols
to investigate pollution**

**10 cities required
to reduce sewage spills by 75%**

**12 new state laws
to stop oil spills**

**\$11 million generated
to restore the Bay**

**300 miles of shoreline mapped
to plan for sea level rise**

**Help us hold polluters
accountable and defend the Bay
for another 30 years.**

**Become a Bay champion by
making a gift using the attached
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Photo: Robb Most



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Fall/Winter 2019 Baykeeper News

Celebrating the Bay & Taking Action to Protect It



More than 250 swimmers, paddlers, boaters, and supporters came out for the 6th annual Bay Parade in a colorful celebration of a healthy Bay. **Thanks to our generous sponsors and everyone who helped make the Bay Parade a huge success!**

🐟 Field Investigator Cole Burchiel (*pictured*) recently joined the Baykeeper team. Cole investigates reports to our pollution hotline, oversees Bay patrols and cleanups, and supports Baykeeper’s scientific advocacy. **Welcome, Cole!** 🐟 In September, Baykeeper hosted a trash cleanup at India Basin for Coastal Cleanup Day—an event that brings people together worldwide to clean beaches and shorelines. **Thank you to our volunteers for bagging more than 400 pounds of trash that would have ended up polluting the Bay!** 🐟

Photo at top left by Bill Head. Photo bottom right by Roger Cunningham.



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