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Testimony Before the Subcommittee on Water Resources and Environment Regarding "The Raw Sewage Overflow Community Right to Know Act"

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Good afternoon. My name is Stuart Whitford, Water Quality Program Manager for the Kitsap County Health District (Health District). I'm here today to testify in support of H.R. 2452 "Raw Sewage Overflow Community Right to Know Act". The Health District believes that this legislation is a "win" for public health because it will result in fewer waterborne illnesses and lost recreational opportunities due to swimming beach and shellfish harvest closures.

The Kitsap County Health District was organized as a full-time public health agency in 1943. Kitsap County is a peninsula with approximately 220 miles of marine shoreline, surrounded by Puget Sound and Hood Canal. For over sixty years, we have strived to protect and promote the health of Kitsap County residents by preventing and controlling disease, injury, disability, and premature death. Our mission is to "strive to make Kitsap County the healthiest place on the planet to live, work and play."

Since 1992, the Health District and wastewater utilities in Kitsap County have been cooperatively implementing Sewage Spill Reporting and Response Procedures. The purpose of these procedures is to prevent public exposure to sewage spills through public information and notification. This is extremely critical in Kitsap County given the miles of marine shoreline we have and approximately 44,000 people collecting shellfish on those beaches annually. Since 1992, **208** sewage spills totaling **11,356,876** gallons of raw sewage, and **584,075,558** gallons of combined sewer overflows have been reported to the Health District.

The procedures require that wastewater utilities immediately notify the Health District when a sewage spill or combined sewer overflow occurs. It also requires the utility to notify property owners in the immediate vicinity of the spill, post a warning sign at the spill site, and clean up to the maximum extent possible. The Health District visits the spill site typically within one to eight hours to verify the information supplied by the utility, verify that the clean up was done correctly, and assess the need/degree of additional public notification. Public notification may include additional "door-to-door" notification, posting warning signs in the affected area, and issuing an advisory. Advisories are issued by press release, updating our Internet homepage, and updating our Public Health Advisory Hotline. If the spill has impacted a shellfish growing area or has the potential to impact a growing area, the Washington State Department of Health is immediately notified.

A recent sewage spill in Kitsap County highlights the need for H.R. 2452. At 1:30pm on June 27, 2007, the City of Port Orchard reported a sewage spill to the Health District. They reported that a small spill occurred when a gravity main plugged, forcing sewage out of a manhole onto the surface of the ground. The area was fairly overgrown with vegetation, so it appeared to City wastewater personnel that the spill was limited to the immediate area around the manhole. The plug was removed, and dolomite lime was spread on the ground in the area to soak up any remaining liquid, control odors, and inactivate pathogens.

The Health District visited the site that afternoon and verified that the main had been restored to service and the immediate area cleaned up. However, the inspector observed a fairly steep drop off just below the manhole and decided to push further into the brush just to make sure that no sewage had made it down the hill. What he saw was shocking – a fifteen-foot wide swath of grey slime oozing down the hill, with all the vegetation and trees standing lifeless. Unable to continue his investigation above the spill, he decided to get below it. He found a dirt access road down slope from the sewer main that led to a city sewer pump station, private stormwater pond, and wetlands. As he approached the stormwater pond the smell of sewage became overpowering. When he reached the perimeter fence he could see that the entire pond was filled with sewage, and every tree and shrub on its banks was dead. Looking up the hill

just above the pond, he could see the swath of sewage reaching from the top of the hill into the stormwater pond.

The City of Port Orchard and Washington State Department of Ecology were immediately notified. The City built a road to access the pond, and then pumped it's contents to the nearby pump vault. This revealed a thick layer of sludge at the bottom of the pond that had to be dealt with. The sludge was removed by August 15, 2007, completing the spill cleanup.

The Health District and the City then analyzed the pump "run-time" data for the nearby sewage pump station, immediately down-slope of the sewer main that had plugged. This data had been collected by the City on a daily basis by visiting the pump station, reading the meters, and recording the time for each pump. The pump "run time" data was graphed for the past two years, and the results were startling. We determined that the spill had actually started occurring two years previous, on June 12, 2005. Since that date, approximately **6510 gallons of raw sewage per day** had been discharging to the stormwater pond and nearby wetlands. This means that a total of **4,843,440** gallons of raw sewage had been spilled.

If the City had an "alert" system in place as required by H.R. 2452, the impacts of the spill on the environment and the City/Health District response cost could have been significantly mitigated. This is why the Health District is testifying today in support of H.R. 2452. We believe it will protect public health and the environment, and, in the long term, save taxpayer money.

This concludes my testimony. I'll answer any questions you may have.