
SACRAMENTO ENVIRONMENTAL COMMISSION

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*A JOINT COMMISSION APPOINTED BY:
County of Sacramento
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City Folsom
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City of Galt
City of Isleton*

December 18, 2017

Don Nottoli, Chair
Sacramento County Board of Supervisors
700 H Street, Suite 1450
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Concerns Regarding the Proposed Reorganization of the Environmental Management Department

Dear Chair Nottoli:

The Sacramento Environmental Commission (SEC) is a joint County/City appointed commission chartered June 14, 1988 to advise the Sacramento County Board of Supervisors and the City Councils of Folsom, Galt, Isleton, Elk Grove and Sacramento on environmental issues facing our communities. As part of its role, the SEC provides input on effective comprehensive environmental protection and management programs.

The SEC has considered the proposed reorganization to demote the County of Sacramento, Environmental Management Department (EMD) from a department to a division within a larger Department of Health Services. The SEC recommends that the EMD retain its department status and that any administrative reorganization not interfere or alter the effectiveness of ongoing environmental protection programs.

The Proposed Reorganization Will Negatively Impact EMD's Role to Protect the Public Health, Safety and Welfare

The SEC is concerned that the proposed reorganization will reduce the effectiveness of EMD and increase costs to the County by:

- Establishing two levels of administrative management over technical EMD managers and staff who are responsible for meeting a wide variety of regulatory requirements, authorizing use of incident response personnel, and coordinating with multiple regulated communities who fund EMD programs.
- Eliminating control over staff hiring, training, and education that is imperative to proper function of the agency.
- Diverting the focus of technical senior managers to include a broad range of social-issue topics that have no common features with EMD programs, regulated communities, or funding sources.

- Interfering with the oversight of future programs such as those which may be associated with commercial cannabis cultivation, which will require additional EMD staff time to oversee hazardous waste permitting.

The Reorganization is Inconsistent with County Goals Established by the County Toxic Task Force

The goal of establishing EMD in 1988 was to create a single County-wide authority capable of responding to the myriad environmental and hazardous materials regulations that were becoming enforced. At that time, the County Toxic Task Force found that the organizational structure of the Sacramento County Health Department and other agencies was not suitable and a strategy that elevated EMD to a higher level in the County administrative system would better implement the critical environmental protection programs. The strategy to elevate EMD to department-level was approved by the Board of Supervisors in February, 1988, when it enacted Ordinance No. SCC 0718.

The EMD Director is often called upon by members of the Board of Supervisors to address inquiries about current technical matters. This direct communication has worked well and provided elected officials with information to address constituents' concerns for many years. The proposed reorganization will result in a filtering of questions and responses through several levels of administration that are not knowledgeable about the technical issues on a day-to-day basis.

EMD Effectively Oversees 33 Technical Environmental Programs

As the regulatory environmental has grown more complex, the responsibilities of EMD has expanded to include thirty-three programs involving hazardous materials generators and storers, small drinking water systems, underground storage tanks, incident response, accidental release, wells and monitoring wells, food protection and inspections, body art, recreational health, waste tires, and childhood lead exposure investigations. Each of these environmental responsibilities requires staff and management that are trained and knowledgeable about technical issues, regulatory requirements, and understanding of the regulated-sectors' concerns and efforts for compliance.

EMD has an excellent track record and continues to successfully meet its goals and objectives to protect the Sacramento County environment. This success has been demonstrated in part, by the number and breadth of awards received. Over the past eight years, EMD has been recognized with eighteen awards for best management practices, outstanding program implementation, innovation, and public outreach and communications. Most recently, EMD received the 2015 Solutions Significant Achievement Award for establishing its Cross-Connection Control internet portal. (<http://www.emd.saccounty.net/EC/Pages/CrossConnection.aspx>)

EMD has a Positive and Cost-Effective Relationship with the Regulated Community

EMD is responsive to the Sacramento County business community that conduct activities over which it has regulatory responsibility. In this role, EMD has maintained excellent communication and coordination to ensure consistent and cost-effective implementation of regulatory actions. Sacramento businesses that are subject to regulatory oversight must continue to be given the County's highest priority by working with a department-level agency on matters that can require substantial costs, investments, and time to achieve desired environmental protection. Additional layers of administration that focus on providing public social services will only act to diffuse the commercial business focus of EMD and diminish its effectiveness.

These awards and established relationships with the Sacramento business community demonstrate that EMD is functioning as originally approved by Board of Supervisors. Consolidating the various programs under a single department-level authority has enabled EMD to develop and implement reasonable, effective and cost-conscious programs that are contributing to protecting the Sacramento County environment.

The proposed reorganization has a high potential to reduce program effectiveness, established cost controls, and direct interaction with the regulated Community. There is no obvious issue with EMD's performance that warrants a change in department management structure, operations, or activities.

Recommendation

EMD can continue to be a point of excellence recognized by local and statewide interests. Actions that can disrupt its structure, decision authority and technical operations will have repercussions on EMD's ability to continue functioning in a cost-effective manner to achieve County environmental protection goals.

Therefore, we recommend that the proposed reorganization of EMD not be implemented.

If the Board of Supervisors decides to further consider the reorganization of EMD, members of the SEC are available to participate in a comprehensive environmental regulatory program review to ensure continued effectiveness and cost efficiency.

Thank you for considering our concerns.

Sincerely,



Richard Hunn, Chair
Sacramento Environmental Commission

Cc: Nav Gill, County Executive, Sacramento County
Clerk of the Board, Sacramento County
Supervisor Serna, Sacramento County
Supervisor Kennedy, Sacramento County
Supervisor Peters, Sacramento County
Supervisor Frost, Sacramento County
Mayor Darrell Steinberg, City of Sacramento
Mayor Steve Miklos, City of Folsom
Mayor Mark Crews, City of Galt
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