

## **HELP SAVE THE BAY . . . KEEP POLLUTION AWAY!**

Most people don't realize that emptying oil and other pollutants into a gutter or storm drain contributes to pollution in our creeks and San Francisco Bay. Because storm drains are separate from household sewer systems in most of the Bay Area, the storm water flows directly into the Bay without treatment. This is one of the reasons that Flo the Raccoon was chosen as the Palo Alto's Storm Drain Program mascot. The program uses Flo the Raccoon to assist in getting the word out about pollution problems related to storm drains. Posters, brochures and Flo cards are just a few of the items that are handed out.

Bay pollutants also come from the Regional Water Quality Control Plant (RWQCP), which treats wastewater from homes and businesses and discharges the treated water to the Bay adjacent to Palo Alto. Palo Alto's pollution prevention program is designed to reduce the amount of pollutants flowing to the RWQCP. The pollution prevention program takes a positive approach in multimedia efforts to regulate and educate residents and businesses through public participation and are the keys to the success of environmental compliance programs.

Palo Alto's RWQCP was designed to remove biological wastes from the sewage of Palo Alto, Mountain View, East Palo Alto, Los Altos, Los Altos Hills, and Stanford University. However, with the development of Silicon Valley and the mid-peninsula as a center for light industry in northern California, the composition of local waste has changed significantly. Although the RWQCP does an excellent job of removing solids and organic wastes, significant quantities of toxic metals continue to reach the fragile ecosystem of south San Francisco Bay. Even though the plant's pollutant loading has been reduced dramatically, pollutants can present an ongoing hazard for fish, birds, and other wildlife. Therefore, the Regional Water Quality Control Board has recently imposed even more stringent discharge standards. In order to meet the new standards, the plant must look to the industrial, commercial, and residential sectors for reductions in silver, copper, lead, nickel, zinc, mercury, and cyanide.

According to an engineering study commissioned by the City of Palo Alto, additional treatment would add at least \$20 million per year to RWQCP costs. This would triple the current budget. In the 1990's "Source Reduction" and "Pollution Prevention" are the most economical and responsible paths to solving the problem in the Bay.

Research continues to identify household chemicals and products that contribute significantly to metals loadings at the RWQCP. Residents are being asked NOT to flush those chemicals away, but to minimize their use and save leftover quantities for the next Household Hazardous Waste Collection Day. One household chemical to be identified as a specific problem for the RWQCP is copper sulfate root control crystals, which people pour down their toilets to kill roots in sewer pipes and prevent plumbing backups. These crystals are about 25% copper (by weight), almost all of which ends up at the treatment plant.

If you have any questions or if you would like Flo to visit your Palo Alto classroom or event, please call Margaret Adkins at (415) 329-2598.