



CLIMATE CHANGE... IF WE GO UNDERWATER, THEN WHAT?...

At Heal the Ocean, we are focused on the emergency preparedness (or what is called “adaption response”) part of climate change – namely, the rising ocean. We all know what havoc was done to the East Coast by Hurricane Sandy and other hurricanes preceding Sandy. What didn’t get publicized much about those storm events was the flooding of wastewater facilities.

Unfortunately, wastewater treatment plants are situated next to the water – for (guess what) – easy disposal. This means that the flooding of wastewater treatment plants is a national issue. The problem is not only that the ocean is coming inland, but that the groundwater – which is connected to the ocean – will rise as well – a perfect combination for flooding.

In the City of Santa Barbara, the old Estero area (that surrounds the El Estero Wastewater Treatment Plant) will be inundated in a 100-year storm event. So will the Airport, which is essentially built in the Goleta Slough.

With the implementation of California’s landmark climate change law in full swing and

following the example of communities across the nation who are working to address climate change, the City of Santa Barbara put out its Draft Climate Action Plan in June 2012, asking for public comment.

HTO took a look at this document and were quite in awe of the fact that some important graphics in this document having to do with the downtown/waterfront area were not included in the body of the City’s “Plan Santa Barbara,” which contained graphic details in an appended study, as well as graphics, showing how much of the City’s present coastline could be flooded during storm events by the year 2100.

In August 2012, HTO approached the Santa Barbara City Council with a simple message: we need to start planning for the affects of sea level rise, not a month from now, a year from now, nor a Century from now, but today. We made a presentation showing the Council its own maps (shown here on this page) – that show the risk of flooding due to sea level rise by 2100, and urged specific steps to be taken immediately to address the vulnerability of the City’s El Estero Wastewater Treatment Plant, to the



Photo by Kelly Lane/SMERGE

Airport, to waterfront properties, and to buried infrastructure used for electricity, gas, and sewer.

In the meantime, Heal the Ocean continues to sound our horn on the need for every coastal city in this country to consider adaptation planning as important as controlling emissions – with particular focus on the vulnerability of wastewater treatment plants. The prospect of uncontained wastewater is a nasty picture none of us wants to think about.

