

Educational Entertainment

THE CENTRAL MARIN (CALIF.) SANITATION AGENCY JOINS EFFORTS WITH FIVE OTHER LOCAL AGENCIES TO CREATE CROWD-PLEASING EDUCATION PROGRAMS

By Briana Jones

Working together is nothing new for the Wastewater Treatment Agencies of Marin County, Calif.

Central Marin Sanitation Agency coordinates education programs for itself and five other agencies, including Las Gallinas Valley Sanitary District, Novato Sanitary District, Sausalito-Marín City Sanitary District, Tiburon-Belvedere Sanitary District and Sewerage Agency of Southern Marin.

Six wastewater treatment plants serve all of Marin County, home to about 250,000 people. "We have a memorandum of understanding between the six wastewater agencies," says Robert Cole, environmental services manager for Central Marin Sanitation Agency. "It forms the Wastewater Treatment Agencies of Marin County Public Education Program. Our agency administers the program, so we schedule all the events, handle all the performers, handle all the reporting requirements, and schedule all the meetings."

The six agencies are members of Sav-R-Bay, an award-winning public awareness and environmental education program dedicated to protecting San Francisco Bay.

In the Captain Polluto puppet show, "The Scientist" explains how pipes connect homes to the wastewater treatment plant and that rain goes untreated down storm drains.



WHAT IS EDUTAINMENT?

Central Marin offers a variety of education outlets to teach kids about wastewater treatment. "Edutainment is educational entertainment," says Cole. "We wanted to come up with a program for educating school-age children in grades K-5. We also have a high school program. And we wanted to be entertaining, something that the students would want to see."

Edutainment has something for everyone. It includes puppet shows, magicians, juggling, and much more. "In 1998, we produced a script, hired a magician and produced *Abracadabra It's Water*," says Cole. "That was in the 1999-2000 school year."

"*Abracadabra It's Water* is all about water. It rains in the clouds, produces stormwater, goes into reservoirs, and becomes drinking water. Then people use that water in their homes and it goes through the sewers and becomes wastewater. Finally it gets treated and goes back into the bay, and through evaporation it goes back to the clouds and becomes rain. It's the whole water cycle."

The magic show was the first education program created by the agencies to bring interactive learning to public schools in the area. "Magic happens in the wastewater treatment plant where they clean the water," says Cole. "Poof! Out would come a glass of water from his hat and it's clear again."

Next in the edutainment lineup was *Where Does It Go?* (now called *Go With the Flow*), for grades 3-5.

Doug Nolan juggles a toilet seat and what should not go down the toilet in the *Go With The Flow* show.



What's Your Story?

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Doug Nolan and The Sippy Cups perform to several thousand people at the Marin County Fair main stage in a show about wastewater treatment and pollution prevention.

This juggling show includes performer Doug Nolan of Rock Steady Juggling who teaches the importance of keeping water clean by juggling objects that can or should not go down the drain. "His show is incredible. Incredibly expensive, but incredibly effective," says Cole. "All the classes wanted it. It was always sold out."

Strictly about wastewater, Captain Polluto is for grades K-2. Joe and Ronna Leon, owners of Caterpillar Puppets, created this show specifically for the Wastewater Treatment Agencies of Marin County.

Puppets tell the story of how Captain Polluto arrives on Earth, but refuses to drink the water because on his planet water is so polluted it is poison. The story explains how the agencies handle water to keep it clean.

"It starts in the schools because that's where children learn things, and they take it home to their parents. They say, 'Mom and dad, you can't put that down the drain.'"

ROBERT COLE

MANAGING FUNDS

The Wastewater Treatment Agencies of Marin County receive \$75,000 annually for the education programs. "We're lucky because we have the funding, and in order to have the funding you have six wastewater treatment plants coming together, sharing the costs," says Cole.

"It's nice having a joint program because you have the availability of staffing, funding and more ideas coming together for new programs. It's very successful."

The entertainment is free for the schools. "We produce a list of all the schools in Marin County from the state Office of Education," Cole says. "We were doing all the advertising, but it got to be too much. So we turned that over to the performers. And they don't get paid unless they book a show. Let me tell you, they book shows. They book as many shows as

they possibly can. They'll be much more aggressive doing it themselves rather than us doing it."

Marin County has found a way to incorporate entertainment into the classroom to teach a topic that is increasingly important. Cole says: "It starts in the schools because that's where children learn things, and they take it home to their parents. They say, 'Mom and dad, you can't put that down the drain.'" **tpo**

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