

Madeline Glikfeld, one of the three speakers who preceded Director Wilson, reviewed the history of the Coastal Commission and the reasons for its relative weakness. She said that the Commission's successes can best be measured by what has *not* happened during its tenure:

- No further loss of wetlands or other types of habitats, and
- California has a lower frequency of beach closings for health reasons than other states.

Professor Malcolm Gordon urged journalists to refrain from presenting only a "parade of horrors" to the public, because such a focus obscures the many environmental accomplishments that have been achieved thus far. He also noted, however, that there are many disturbing developments in the ocean environment that are not yet understood – like the appearance of previously unknown marine diseases that are having a disastrous effect on invertebrates. Though human activities are likely to blame, the exact correlation has not yet been discovered.

Environmental Journalists Hear from the Experts about Stormwater Pollution

By Reza Ironpour, Wastewater Engineering Services Division

Bureau Director Judy Wilson was one of four featured speakers on ocean pollution at the Ninth National Conference of the Society of Environmental Journalists.

The conference, which was held in mid-September at UCLA's Tom Bradley International Hall, included sessions ranging from global warming to genetically modified crops and from the effects of NAFTA to the effects of the automobile.

Three speakers preceded Judy Wilson: Madeline Glikfeld, a former member of the California Coastal Commission who is now a researcher at UCLA's Institute of the Environment; Mark Gold, president of Heal the Bay; and Malcolm Gordon, a professor of microbiology at UCLA. (Please see sidebars.)

For the session on ocean pollution entitled *The West: Pacific Blues*, Director Wilson explained some of the vast efforts and varied programs that the Bureau has undertaken to combat stormwater pollution – and on the peculiarities of the Los Angeles area that make this battle so difficult to win.

Using a detailed, compelling presentation created for the occasion by graphic artist Oscar Amaro of the City's Stormwater Management Division, Ms. Wilson explained how the Army

Corps of Engineers created an "underground freeway to the ocean" to prevent flooding – *without first considering what wastes and toxins the torrents of stormwater might carry directly out to sea.*

Because the City does not have the resources to make major changes to this infrastructure, it is tackling the resultant problems through several model programs: The Bureau has developed a multifaceted outreach – aimed at both adults and children – to educate LA's diverse population to adopt non-polluting behaviors in their everyday activities.

Journalists can help

Ms. Wilson urged journalists to assist in this effort by sounding the alarm and presenting the steps that individuals can take to help turn this problem around.

The Bureau is also educating its own employees about how to fulfill their responsibilities in ways that reduce stormwater pollution and how to recognize and report illicit connections to the storm drain system. In addition, the Bureau is working to control erosion, and to promote

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changes in construction practices in order to create significant reductions in runoff pollution.

Standing in the way of more rapid and sweeping improvements to the problem of storm drain and ocean pollution are the shortage of money; the difficulty in promoting behavior changes in adults - and industries; and current limitations in scientific knowledge.

Because science has not yet identified the sources for some problems – like the rising levels of copper pollution in the water – it is difficult to know how to correct them. Though a likely source of the copper is automobile brake linings, this is not an established fact. Without sufficient data to back up a plea for change – or knowledge of non-polluting alternatives – there is little that the Bureau can do to reduce this pollutant.

Important role

That's why the role of journalists is so important in the effort to clean up our urban and ocean environments.

Ms. Wilson concluded by asking those in attendance to join in the campaign to alert the public to the environmental degradation caused by non-point source pollution to increase the general willingness to push for change. ■

Conference speaker, Mark Gold, president of **Heal the Bay**, discussed the many pollutants contained in runoff – from municipal storm drains, agriculture, construction sites and industries. He said that when concern about runoff became strong enough in the late 1980s to prompt legislative action, attempts were made to create a plan similar to the successful point source reduction program mandated by the Federal Clean Water Act in 1972. But the lack of funds to build treatment facilities, and the lack of standards by which the EPA could measure improvement and enforce compliance – compounded by the strong resistance exerted by lobbies for the various industries responsible for much of this pollution – doomed the effort to failure from the start.

Through its on-going campaign to evaluate and publicize water quality at 250 beaches in the Los Angeles area, **Heal the Bay** has helped to maintain a high level of public awareness about the problems of ocean pollution from non-point sources. This awareness is crucial for motivating people to accept personal responsibility for eliminating their own contribution to runoff contamination.

