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## Deadline approaches for Placer County to upgrade sewage plans

Auburn would have three years to upgrade its wastewater plants if it doesn't join Lincoln

Sacramento Business Journal - by [Celia Lamb](#) Staff writer

Officials in Placer County face imminent deadlines for developing a \$100 million regional sewage pipeline.

The county and the cities within it have talked for years about closing small, out-of-date sewage plants and building large pipelines that would send waste to newer plants in Lincoln and Roseville.

Decision time has arrived, especially for Auburn and the county.

Utility managers, faced with tougher wastewater quality regulations, are considering building a regional pipeline system and reducing the number of wastewater treatment plants that would cut the amount of work regionally and spread out the costs in the long term.

But it won't be cheap. The county has estimated it would need \$100 million for a pipeline to take waste from communities north of Auburn all the way to Lincoln.

Lincoln, which completed its wastewater treatment plant in 2004, planned ahead by putting in oversize pipelines. The city intended not just to plan for its own growth, but also for the possibility that Auburn and Placer County would tie in.

The Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board wants to know by June 1 whether Auburn and the county will link up to the Lincoln facility or upgrade their own treatment plants. And Lincoln needs to know by April or May whether to include those flows in the design for a plant expansion, said David Bennett, managing principal of Rocklin-based ECO:LOGIC Engineering.

Eco:logic designed the Lincoln plant and will engineer the expansion. The company also has a five-year contract to operate and manage the plant.

"There's going to be an expansion of the Lincoln plant," Bennett said. "The question is how large of an expansion. There are economies of scale for all three agencies to combine the flow."

### The solution to pollution

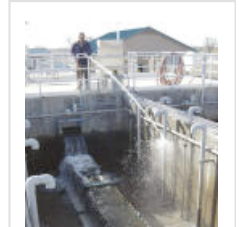
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency clamped down on wastewater standards for California in 2000. The California Toxics Rule set stringent limits on 23 wastewater pollutants that could harm aquatic organisms in wastewater and 57 that pose a threat to human health. The standards are so restrictive that some communities' wastewater is "cleaner" than their drinking water.

The regulations have hit small, inland communities especially hard. Water quality is measured at the point the water is discharged. In some Central Valley and Sierra foothills communities, wastewater might be the major or only source of water flowing through creeks or ditches in the summer. Because there's no dilution, the discharged wastewater has to be pristine.

Both Auburn and Lincoln discharge their wastewater into Auburn Ravine Creek, where dilution is practically nonexistent in the summer. But the Lincoln plant is state-of-the-art and has had no violations since it started. Auburn's plant has a cease-and-desist order from the water board.

At a minimum, Auburn would need to replace chlorine disinfection with an ultraviolet light system and cut down on nitrogen releases to meet wastewater quality standards. Upgrading the plant would cost an estimated \$11.7 million.

The city has prepared by raising monthly sewer bills. The current rate of \$52.50 per unit will increase to \$54.25 in July, and



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Justin Gregory washes tertiary sand filters at the Lincoln wastewater treatment plant, which is operated by ECO:LOGIC.

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increase each year until it hits \$60.50 on July 1, 2011.

If Auburn decides to keep using its own plant, the city would have to finish the upgrades by March 2011. If it decides to join Lincoln, the water board would extend the deadline to 2013 to allow for the construction of a regional pipeline. The cost would be about the same, Bennett said.

Placer County, which has four wastewater treatment plants, wants to join the Lincoln system. It has a cease-and-desist order for the plant that serves about 15,000 people north of Auburn, the Auburn Municipal Airport and Auburn's industrial area.

Upgrading that plant would cost \$81 million, according to a county report. The regional pipeline would cost \$20 million more than the plant upgrade, but the county estimates it would be more economical over 30 years because the county would not have to pay the costs of obtaining permits, upgrading and operating its own plant.

The county hopes for federal funding to help pay for the proposed regional pipeline. It raised monthly rates from \$59.51 to \$67.84 last year, but that was primarily to cover higher operating costs.

Residential sewer service in Lincoln costs \$16 per month. The city paid for its wastewater treatment plant with developer fees, said John Pedri, Lincoln's public works director.

"Some cities and agencies missed the boat ... by not working with developers," he said.

Pedri said environmental consultants have been working on routing studies for bringing in waste from Auburn and the county. A new pipeline along Highway 193 reaches about one-third of the way to Auburn.

#### **\$100 to flush a toilet**

The pipeline to Lincoln wouldn't help residents in the Horseshoe Bar area, south of Auburn in unincorporated Placer County. Monthly sewer rates in that area increased last year from \$74.76 to a whopping \$99.43, and that doesn't include future capital costs the county will need for the 615 customers served by a treatment plant in their community.

The county also faces hundreds of thousands of dollars in penalties per year if it does not upgrade that plant, which was built in 1961. Modernizing the plant would cost \$12.9 million.

The county has asked the Central Valley Regional Water Quality Control Board for permission to shut down that treatment plant and divert the waste to Roseville's Dry Creek Wastewater Treatment Plant. The pipeline would cost about \$19.5 million, but as with the pipeline to Lincoln, the county believes it would be cheaper in the long run.

Roseville wastewater utility director Art O'Brien said the city is prepared to take the wastewater from that part of the unincorporated county.

"We've already evaluated that flow and incorporated it into our expansion plans," he said. "It's a good concept."

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