
Adopt-A-Channel Program

Overview: A community stewardship-based program to improve the physical appearance of Orange County's flood control channels and enhance the environment through trash and graffiti removal.

Challenge: The Orange County Flood Control District (District), through OC Public Works, operates and maintains more than 380 miles of regional and sub-regional flood control channels, which provide a vital service protecting life and property by conveying stormwater runoff and preventing flooding. The channels collect trash, debris, may be subject to graffiti, and require significant resources at a considerable expense to OC Public Works (over \$2 million in FY 2014-15). New statewide trash regulations are expected to result in additional Best Management Practice measures and maintenance efforts to prevent and address trash in the County's channels and storm drains.

Innovative Solution: In 2011, after a decade of increased public interest with environmental concerns, the Disneyland Resort reached out to OC Public Works wanting to adopt the reach of Anaheim-Barber Channel located just downstream of their theme park. This sparked a successful two-year pilot adoption where the Disneyland Resort hired a contractor to regularly remove trash and paint over graffiti in the Channel. A countywide Adopt-A-Channel Program was then developed and approved by the County Board of Supervisors in December 2014. The Program included several fundamental shifts in how OC Public Works views and manages its flood facilities. First, the Program allowed for sponsored and volunteer adoptions where local organizations, or even families, were permitted access to flood control channel to conduct cleanup events. After some initial resistance, a guidance manual was developed and volunteer liability insurance was purchased, and it was decided that the potential benefits of a channel adoption outweighed the risks. The Program encountered a challenge with the proposed adopter recognition signs as it was unclear whether they could be allowed under current policies which strictly prohibited advertising in District facilities. A marketing plan was developed that focused on increased awareness of the need to keep Orange County's channels and downstream bays and beaches clean.

Originality: As part of the Program development, a literature review was conducted looking for similar public agency stewardship programs on which to model the Program design, yet no similar flood control channel adoption program was found. The vision and originality of the Program caught the attention of world renowned marine life artist, Wyland, who created and donated a logo to the Program. The logo is

now depicted on adopter recognition signs and on Program marketing materials. OC Public Works needed to find an avenue to promote the Program and educate the public about flood control channels and their role in the watershed. A novel marketing approach was employed using an interactive GIS story map webpage (<http://arcg.is/1L7cVom>) to provide potential adopters with channel photos, access points, potential recognition sign locations and other logistical data important to learning about a channel reach and committing to an adoption.

Cost Effectiveness: The Adopt-A-Channel Program has not only resulted in direct cost-savings in channel maintenance costs to OC Public Works, but also has allowed County crews to focus limited resources on more problematic reaches of the channels. As a result, the increased frequency of channel cleaning has had more far-reaching benefits. Specifically, as graffiti is painted over on a timelier basis, artists are less likely to return resulting in not only less graffiti, but also less trash as empty spray paint cans, cigarette butts, food wrappers, etc. had often been left in the channel. Visibly cleaner channels and signage can also change public perception as organizations, businesses, and residents begin to view their local flood control channel as something worth taking ownership of and a reflection of community values.

Results: Since the approval of the countywide Adopt-A-Channel Program in December 2014, over 17 miles of channel have been adopted by eight local businesses, agencies, organizations, and individuals including the two-mile channel reach that Disneyland Resort has continued to sponsor since 2012. As of April 2016, over 8,900 pounds of trash and debris and 42,000 square feet of graffiti have been removed from Orange County channels. As the Program receives additional exposure, it is expected that adoptions will increase in coming years and represent a significant percentage of total channel miles operated by the District.

Program Contacts:

Kacen Clapper Chief, Stormwater Compliance (714) 955-0677 kacen.clapper@ocpw.ocgov.com	Kimberly Buss Environmental Resources Specialist (714) 955-0675 kimberly.buss@ocpw.ocgov.com
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