

City of San Diego settles wastewater treatment lawsuit

ASSOCIATED PRESS

4:35 p.m. May 5, 2005

SAN DIEGO – The city of San Diego has agreed to complete \$187 million in sewer projects and maintenance in the next year to shore up its dilapidated system under a settlement filed in federal court.

Enough sewer improvement projects are under way to meet the terms of the deal, which arises from a 2001 lawsuit in which two environmental groups charged that frequent sewage spills violated the federal Clean Water Act. The federal government later joined the lawsuit filed by San Diego Baykeeper and the Surfrider Foundation.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said the settlement, filed Tuesday in San Diego federal court, was as good as possible given the city's severe financial problems.

Clean water advocates, who want a long-term pact, agreed with the EPA, while the city's wastewater experts vowed to continue programs that have slashed sewage spills recent years.

If the city fails to meet deadlines in the agreement, it could be fined up to thousands of dollars a day. Regulators expressed confidence that penalties could be avoided.

In December, the city said construction on more than \$334 million of water and sewer capital projects in 2005 had been put on hold because of the city's difficulty in borrowing money. But other projects already in progress would proceed.