

## New flood control chief could use public's help

By Arne Anselm Guest writer

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New leadership will take over at the Ventura County Watershed Protection District on Monday.

Norma Camacho has been appointed director of the district, filling the vacancy left by Jeff Pratt, who is now director of the county Public Works Agency.

An engineer by training, Camacho came to the Solid Waste Department with experience in minimizing hazardous waste. Most recently she was a deputy executive officer in the finance division of the County Executive Officer's Office. She also has worked as a budget analyst for several agencies, including Public Works.

Her diverse background with the county prepares her well to manage the challenges the district faces.

Camacho has respect for the taxpayer, saying "responsible and accountable use of public resources is vital for the district to be successful in its mission."

That mission is to protect life, property, watercourses, watersheds, and public infrastructure from dangers and damages associated with floods and stormwater.

The district was formed in 1944 as the Ventura County Flood Control District to control and conserve waters from floods and storms and protect watersheds, life and property from damage or destruction from those waters.

In 2003, it became the county Watershed Protection District to reflect changes in community values, regulatory requirements, and funding opportunities. The change also reflected a desire to emphasize integrated watershed management and solve flood-control problems with environmentally sound approaches.

### A web of responsibilities

There are many challenges ahead for the new director, including the operation and maintenance of 204 miles of flood-control facilities, 61 miles of levees, 44 debris and detention basins and four pump stations.

The levees present perhaps the greatest challenge, not in their maintenance but in the paperwork required for federal certification. In 2005, the Federal Emergency Management Agency initiated efforts to verify the certification status of levees to provide protection from a 100-year flood.

The district has already obtained provisional accreditation, however it still needs to provide FEMA the complete technical documentation confirming that the levee systems meet those standards by the end of this year.

Camacho acknowledges that "levee certification is one of the highest priorities for the district."

### New rules from state

The district also faces a challenge in controlling water quality. In May, the Regional Water Quality Control Board adopted a groundbreaking permit policy to protect against stormwater pollution. The permit details the measures the district, the county and the cities in Ventura County must take to protect water quality in creeks, rivers and the

ocean.

On top off that, the state has put special requirements on any discharge, including stormwater, flowing into some rivers and creeks in the county that are not as clean as they need to be. These requirements, called total maximum daily loads, or TMDLs, are pollutant- and water body-specific.

The district legally shares in the responsibility to clean the water, but really the responsibility is everyone's. Removing pollution from water is much more expensive than preventing it in the first place. When the public works to prevent pollution, it not only helps the environment, but the district and taxpayers as well.

Here are some simple things everyone can do:

n Yards and driveways: Water plants, not sidewalks; excessive watering can carry fertilizers and chemicals into gutters. Use a broom rather than a hose on the driveway.

n Carwashing: Use commercial carwashes that capture wash water, or wash vehicle on your lawn and avoid "spray on, rinse off" engine and wheel cleaners.

n Trash cans: Keep the lid down. Covered cans keep the wind and birds from spreading litter.

n Street sweeping: Park off the street on sweeping days.

n Tool cleaning: Don't use the gutter or driveway for washing. Water from paintbrushes, cement mixers, tools, even pots and pans are not allowed down the gutter.

n Pets: Bacteria can get into creeks and the ocean from pet waste not picked up.

These little things not only are good for the plants and animals, but they also help the district meet its goals and as a result help everyone's tax dollars go further.

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