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Photo: Highline School District

In this case, a big pile of mud means big progress. See [story](#).

RCAA Calls for Co-operative Efforts To Prevent Water-Quality Violations At Third-Runway Construction Site

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[Order by Department of Ecology](#)

According to the Department of Ecology, Port of Seattle contractors violated the water-quality rules for Sea-Tac Airport on eight different occasions between 13 October & 15 December. The results were discharges of muddy or contaminated water into Lake Reba, Miller Creek, Walker Creek, & the wetlands of Walker Creek. Most of the violations happened at the third-runway site.

The first two incidents both occurred on 13 October. Water used to flush mud and dirt off the north haul road ended up Miller Creek. Later that day, the storm drain catch basin on SR 518 allowed muddy water from highway flushing activities to discharge into Miller Creek.

On 31 October, a storm drain outfall was found to be discharging turbid water into Lake Reba.

On 1 November, turbid water was found leaking out of Pond "D" into Miller Creek at 8th So. This unauthorized discharge caused a violation of turbidity standards in Miller Creek.

In the evening of 3 November and early hours of 4 November, approximately 1.5 million gallons of muddy water went downstream into Walker Creek all the way to the Sound. Spawning salmon were documented to have been in Walker Creek & lower Miller Creek at the time.

The worst violation was a discharge of more than 2 million gallons of industrially-contaminated stormwater that was sent into the headwaters of Miller Creek, after an employee accidentally left a gate valve open on the main Industrial Wastewater System pipeline. If the valve had been closed, the contaminated water would have gone, as was required, to the IWS treatment plant. No word as to whether fish were in the Creek at the time. This incident took place on 25 November.

On 5 December, turbid water was drained onto unstable soils adjacent to wetlands & Miller Creek. Turbid water entered wetlands, a side channel, & Miller Creek itself.

The last violation, on 15 December, appears to have been intentional. The contractor was caught pumping process wastewater from the wheel-wash water pond into stormwater Pond "M", rather than sending it to an authorized treatment facility. This was an unauthorized discharge into the stormwater system, which is not set-up to handle this sort of

contamination.

The violations are detailed in an “Immediate Action Order”, issued by Ecology on January 9.

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RCAA Calls for Co-operative Efforts To Prevent Water-Quality Violations At Third-Runway Construction Site

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[RCAA Letter to Mark Reis, Airport
managing director](#)

The Regional Commission on Airport Affairs has called for fast action by Sea-Tac Airport and the Department of Ecology to prevent additional environmental damage to local streams & wetlands from side effects of Airport construction.

There have been eight documented violations of the Airport's water-quality permits in the months of October, November & December. Worse, the violations are increasingly damaging to the local environment. Well over 4 million gallons of contaminated or turbid water have been dumped into local streams, wetlands, & other waterbodies.

Writing in mid-January to Mark Reis, Airport managing director, RCAA offered to work closely with the Airport, the Department of Ecology, other citizen groups, & near-by cities to learn why these problems continue to occur. RCAA wrote, "Given the long contentious history of the third-runway project, RCAA might be expected to take a very adversarial stand in response to these violations. But we would prefer to work with the Department & the Airport to try to understand & correct the underlying causes of the problems."

A meeting between Mr Reis & RCAA's president, Larry Corvari, is pending.

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Fines totaling \$101,000 have been assessed against the Port of Seattle for the water-quality violations that are detailed in other places in this newsletter. But is the fear of fines a sufficient incentive to prevent future violations? The Department of Ecology apparently thinks not.

As a result of the recent violations, the Department issued an “Immediate Action Order” to the Airport on January 9, requiring various corrective actions. The Order sets a 60-day deadline for providing Ecology with a detailed schematic of the Airport’s entire stormwater control, conveyance, and treatment system for the third-runway project. The Port must provide detailed specifications of all ponds, pipes, plugs, pumps, wheel washes, conveyances, power supplies, and treatment systems. The inference is that the Port’s system is inadequate.

The Port is also required to conduct a thorough evaluation of the way the system actually works—operations, maintenance, the decision-making process for managing stormwater, oversight of the contractor and subcontractors, procedures for notification in the case of apparent violations, & other aspects. The Port is required to make recommendations for necessary improvements. Here, Ecology is focusing on what may be the key problem—a disconnect between the rules—which the Port fully understands—and the day-to-day decisions by contractor employees on the spot.

Ecology followed up on this theme by setting a 45-day deadline for a full evaluation of the training, co-ordination, communications, & oversight of the Airport’s construction-related contractors.

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Port of Seattle officials have sent mixed messages about the recent series of water-quality violations at Sea-Tac. Deputy Airport director Michael Feldman was quoted by the *Seattle Times* as saying “When we have these kind of incidents, I think they [the communities] have every right to express concern about how we are doing. But, he added, “I would say for a project of this magnitude that we have been doing a pretty good job.”

The *Highline Times* quoted Mr Feldman as saying, “We are doing everything possible so it won’t happen again ... Despite the numerous violations, Mr Feldman added, “the project has had a tremendous amount of success”.

In a letter to local cities in early January, Airport Director Mark Reis wrote, “These problems are of great concern to us and are unacceptable in the frequency that we have been experiencing them. I am personally taking steps to prevent further problems. I have directed my staff to sharply focus on detailed evaluations of each event in order to identify the underlying causes. We are conducting follow-on cleanup and creek monitoring and tightening up all our procedures. We are also exploring what additional remedies we may bring to bear on responsible individuals or companies. We continue to work closely with the State and with our contractors, and formally document all significant problems in letters to the Department of Ecology.”

Port Commission President Pat Davis described stormwater runoff & wastewater releases as the most difficult environmental issues at the Airport. In a statement released on January 13, she commented, “It is very disappointing to have a strong track record of environmental management marred by the incidents that occurred last fall. We are asking our staff to intensify prevention, oversight, training, and compliance.” (This comment was an oblique way of saying that the Port accepts the validity of the Order from the Department of Ecology, described in a [companion article in this webletter](#)).

Editorial comment: The standard for compliance with the State’s water-quality rules is NO violations, regardless of the magnitude of the project. The present contractors had been on the job some 560 days when this series of mishaps began. By then, they should have known what the rules & procedures were. The runway fill-hauling project was in its sixth year at the time. By then, Port & Ecology staff on site should have had complete understanding of the problems, & how to deal with them.

It is very encouraging that senior Port of Seattle management is looking very hard and very critically at these violations. We certainly hope they

succeed in tracking down and correcting the problems and that there will not be a repeat of recent events.

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Highline School District Pushes Ahead With New, Quiet Schools

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Courtesy of **BLRP architects**

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Progress in the last few months includes initial work on a new, quiet Mt. Rainier High School & opening of a brand-new North Hill Elementary School.

New High School To Replace 1957 Structure

Mt Rainier High School, built in 1957, was subject to serious noise from Sea-Tac jet traffic, & required extensive maintenance. The District & its consultants decided that the most effective solution was to build a new, better, & larger school from the ground up on the existing site.

Demolition of the old Mt Rainier buildings is now complete. While the site looks like a giant mud hole at the moment, much work has been accomplished. Rough grading of the parking area and driveway is complete. The installation of the storm water system is nearing completion, and the underground water and sewer systems have been roughed in.



Photo: Highline School District

New Mt Rainier High School site, January 2001

The new Mount Rainier High School project will have approximately 205,000 square feet of new construction, providing more space than the previous 152,000 square feet. The new facility is scheduled to open in the fall of 2007. The prime contractor is Lydig Construction, of Spokane, who won the project with a bid of \$47.96 million. The architects are a Tacoma firm, BLRB.

Excavation of footings is underway at the northeast corner of the new building. Steel framing is expected to begin in late February followed by masonry work. Concrete slabs will be poured after the masonry and roof joists are installed. The school is in Des Moines, adjacent to the Mt Rainier Pool.

Mitigation Money Also Funds New Elementary School

Another major noise-mitigation project is the brand-new North Hill Elementary School, which opened in Fall 2005. North Hill is located at 19835 8th Ave. S, Des Moines 98198.

Work on these & similar projects was made possible by an agreement reached in Spring 2002. The Port of Seattle, the State, the FAA, and the District itself each agreed to put up \$50 million (for a total of \$200 million) for noise-mitigation projects for 15 of the schools in the Highline District. The District's share comes from a voter approved \$189.5 million bond issue. The Port funding comes from its annual tax on real property throughout King County.

The Mt Rainier student body moved into the Olympic school building this fall, while the students at Olympic moved into a new building at the North Hill site.

More information on Mt Rainier High School construction can be found at the School District website

<http://www.hsd401.org/projects/mtr/index.htm>

& at the architects' website

<http://www.blrb.com/portfolio/rainier.aspx>

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Water-quality violations resulted in \$101,000 in fines being levied by the Department of Ecology in January.

Ecology announced on 13 January that it had fined the Port of Seattle and its prime contractor \$81,000 for allowing six releases of muddy water from the Sea-Tac Airport third-runway project into Miller and Walker creeks and for pumping industrial waste water into a storm-water treatment system.

Ecology issued the penalty jointly to the Port—which owns and operates the airport—and to TTI Constructors LLC, the prime contractor on the third runway fill haul. The Port will require the contractor to pay the entire fine. Agreement has been reached that the fine will not be appealed. The City of Normandy Park and RCAA are negotiating with the Department and the Port to apply the proceeds from the fine to environmental restoration work in the Miller-Walker Creek basin.

Asleep at the Valve?

On January 20, Ecology issued another fine for \$20,000 for the release of untreated wastewater into Des Moines Creek. Ecology estimates that between 2 million and 2.7 million gallons of water that should have gone into the Industrial Wastewater System entered the creek. The water was contaminated with oil, grease, and de-icing compounds from aviation operations, not from construction work. Taxiways and aircraft parking areas generate a great deal of contaminated water. As required by the Airport's basic water-pollution permit ("NPDES permit"), there is an elaborate system in place for intercepting, collecting and treating that water before it reaches Puget Sound. Kevin Fitzpatrick, Ecology's regional water-quality program supervisor, said that "Sea-Tac has a well-designed industrial treatment system that needs careful and attentive management to work well." Human error—improper valve settings—is blamed for the incident.

The City of Des Moines and RCAA propose that this fine be used for clean-up work in the Des Moines Creek basin. The City has several environmental-restoration projects in planning stages, all of them in need of funding.

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TTA Constructors, LLC, has wound up its work under its two-year contract for fill-hauling for the third runway, awarded in March 2004. Hence, the absence of fill-hauling trucks on SR 509 in the last few weeks.

The trucks will be back soon, however. A Port of Seattle spokesman tells *Truth in Aviation* that the Port has awarded a new one-year fill-hauling contract to TTI, which was the sole bidder for the work. TTI's bid was \$124,777,322.50. The Port's engineers' estimate for the work was \$90-100 million.

No word as to when the trucks will start to roll again. As noted in another article, the Port is required by Ecology to do a complete review of the way it oversees the contractor, & the Port may wish to delay new work till that review is approved by Ecology.

Various contractors have been working on the runway project for six years. Work paused in the period 2002-2003, when the Port did not yet have necessary permits & approvals from environmental regulators to begin construction work in wetlands & other water bodies at the runway site.

This year's contract calls for construction of another 4.6 million cubic yards of the runway embankment, and another 35,000 square feet on the retaining walls. This contract will essentially complete the construction of the embankment. The 2007-08 phase would include actual construction of the 8500-foot runway & the runway safety areas at the ends of the runway.

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