

# Be Sewer Smart, Prevent Sewer Backups Public Education Campaign

Steve Hill Strategic PR on Behalf of the Association of Bay Area Governments, Oakland, California

## SUMMARY

ABAG PLAN's public education campaign, "Be Sewer Smart -- Prevent Sewer Backups," is, 10 years since its inception, helping San Francisco Bay Area homeowners protect their most important investments – their homes – from the risk of sewer backup. The Web-based campaign seeks to empower Bay Area homeowners by educating them about the risks of sewer backups and how to prevent them.

The campaign leverages a unique public outreach effort, and partnerships with local business associations, to accomplish its goal of reducing the frequency of backups. It makes related information such as sewer maintenance tips, including back-up protection information and risk-diagnosis options, widely available to area homeowners through a variety of Web and print communications products.

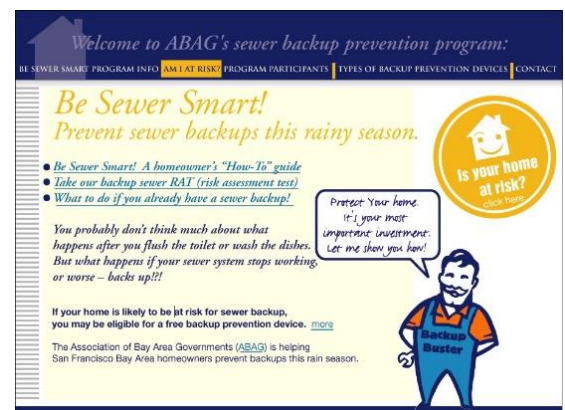
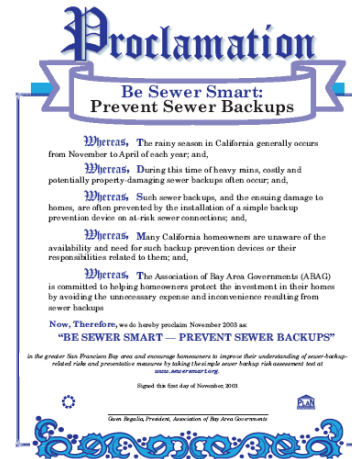
Campaign results far exceeded those initially anticipated and the frequency and severity of backups and backflows began to trend down in the Bay Area for the first time in five years.

## OVERVIEW

- Sewer backups represented the leading cause of loss for ABAG communities
- The steady rise in claim costs led ABAG PLAN to engage Steve Hill Strategic PR to envision, develop and implement an integrated public education campaign
- Be Sewer Smart is a rainy-season campaign to reduce losses by raising homeowner awareness about backups and their prevention
- Be Sewer Smart focuses on public education while integrating internal member efforts under one campaign "umbrella"

## ABOUT

- The comprehensive sewer backup reduction campaign, Be Sewer Smart, helps communities control costs related to sewer backups and backflows by reducing their severity and frequency through an integrated public outreach component that educates homeowners and encourages their involvement
- Through involvement of communities, homeowners and local business, Be Sewer Smart brings together all the players in a position to positively impact the problem
- The focal point for homeowner and business involvement in the campaign is the innovative Website, [www.sewersmart.org](http://www.sewersmart.org)



- Believed the first such public education program to combine training and procedures with a concerted effort to bring together all community players in an active, integrated effort to reduce backups and backflows
- Visitors were driven to the site by the broad media attention given the campaign story and proclamation throughout the Bay Area
- At the end of the first year, the frequency and severity of backups had begun to trend down – for the first time in five years

## OBJECTIVES

- Make back-up info available to 20% of homeowners
- Generate at least 100 online risk assessment tests
- Obtain installation of at least 5 BPDs on at-risk connections
- Attract participation of at least one sponsor
- Set the stage for an ongoing program

## STRATEGY

- Be Sewer Smart was built around a strategic communications plan made up of measurable objectives linked directly to desired business outcomes
- These metrics have allowed ABAG PLAN to clearly track and measure performance and make ongoing judgments about the campaign's value to members
- Thanks to measures of performance built into the communications plan, it has been a simple matter to show how performance exceeded plan objectives
- Smart planning and execution have helped the campaign reach thousands of target-audience homeowners, prompting them to visit [www.sewersmart.org](http://www.sewersmart.org) to learn more
- Savings generated by avoiding backups, are further enhanced by operational efficiencies arising from greater homeowner awareness of sewer use and maintenance issues resulting in further savings and environmental protections

## RESULTS

- Media and Web campaign exceeded all plan objectives in its first year alone:
  - Reached twice the anticipated Bay Area homeowners -- more than 3 million media/Web impressions
  - Some 6,000 online risk tests were taken
  - Hundreds of BPDs were requested
  - Two industry sponsors participated
- Campaign recognized for public affairs excellence with Public Relations Society Compass award
- Campaign has now run for 10 consecutive years delivering results for ABAG and its communities