

United States District Court
For the Northern District of California

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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA RIVER WATCH,
a non-profit corporation;
TEAMSTERS LOCAL 70, a labor
organization; and EAST BAY
ALLIANCE FOR SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY,
a non-profit organization,

No. C 10-03912 CW

ORDER DENYING
DEFENDANTS' MOTION
TO DISMISS
(Docket No. 13)

Plaintiffs,

v.

OAKLAND MARITIME SUPPORT
SERVICES, INC., a corporation;
WILLIAM ABOUDI, an individual;
and JORGE GONZALEZ RIVERA d.b.a.
CHRISTIAN BROTHERS TRUCK
SERVICES, an individual; CITY OF
OAKLAND, a municipality;
REDEVELOPMENT AGENCY OF THE CITY
OF OAKLAND, a local public
agency; and COMMUNITY AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCY, a
public agency,

Defendants.

_____ /

Plaintiffs Northern California River Watch, Teamsters Local
70, and East Bay Alliance for a Sustainable Economy have brought
suit against Defendants, alleging violations of the Clean Water
Act, 33 U.S.C. § 1365. Defendants Oakland Maritime Support

1 Services, Inc. (OMSS) and William Aboudi (Moving Defendants) move
2 to dismiss the suit against them under Federal Rules of Civil
3 Procedure Rules 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6).¹ Docket No. 13. Having
4 considered all of the parties' submissions, the Court denies
5 Moving Defendants' motion to dismiss.

6 BACKGROUND

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8 The Clean Water Act prohibits discharge of pollutants into
9 navigable waterways except as authorized by the statute. San
10 Francisco BayKeeper, Inc. v. Tosco Corp., 309 F.3d 1153, 1156
11 (2002). The Act is largely administered through the National
12 Pollution Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit program,
13 under which states are authorized to issue and administer NPDES
14 permits. Id.; 33 U.S.C. § 1342(b).

15 Plaintiffs' First Amended Complaint alleges the following.
16 Plaintiffs are two California non-profit organizations and a local
17 labor union, whose members live in the San Francisco Bay area and
18 enjoy and use the waters impacted by the alleged violations. OMSS
19 is a California corporation that operates and controls a maritime
20 transportation support facility located at the northern end of the
21 Port of Oakland Harbor Facilities. The OMSS facility covers over
22 700,000 square feet, and is the site of the claimed violations.

23
24 OMSS leases the property from the Redevelopment Agency, and
25 Defendant Jorge Gonzalez, doing business as Christian Brothers
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27 ¹ No proof of service on the other Defendants has been filed.
28 The deadline for serving them is March 2, 2011.

1 Truck Services, is engaged in truck repair and maintenance
2 services at that location. The Community and Economic Development
3 Agency (CEDA) implements projects and programs in the ten areas
4 managed by the Redevelopment Agency. CEDA staff members oversee
5 the day-to-day management of the properties owned and leased by
6 the Redevelopment Agency, including the OMSS facility.

7
8 OMSS began operating its facility on or about August 7, 2006.
9 The facility consists of several buildings, and a yard with paved
10 areas. It is within a few hundred feet of the San Francisco Bay.
11 Industrial activities at the facility allegedly include, but are
12 not limited to, the storage of truck tractors, containers and
13 trailers; truck repair and maintenance; tire, container and
14 trailer repair; and fueling services. As a result of these
15 activities, the substantial industrial machinery and heavy
16 equipment stored at the facility, and the lack of a cover over the
17 property, oil, grease, rinse water, engine coolant, solvents,
18 fuels and various other pollutants are exposed to rainfall and
19 flow unobstructed to storm drains located throughout the facility.
20 In addition, Plaintiffs contend that facility users frequently
21 urinate on the ground, and urine and nitrates are carried by storm
22 water into the drains as well.

23
24 Plaintiffs assert that polluted storm water and non-storm
25 water from the OMSS facility enters up to two dozen storm drains
26 on or adjacent to the property and discharges directly into the
27 Bay in violation of the Clean Water Act. Plaintiffs further
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1 allege that Defendants have failed to comply with a host of
2 permitting, monitoring, and reporting requirements under the Act.

3 LEGAL STANDARD

4 Dismissal is appropriate under Rule 12(b)(1) when the
5 district court lacks subject matter jurisdiction over the claim.
6 Fed. R. Civ. P. 12(b)(1). Subject matter jurisdiction is a
7 threshold issue which goes to the power of the court to hear the
8 case. Federal subject matter jurisdiction must exist at the time
9 the action is commenced. Morongo Band of Mission Indians v. Cal.
10 State Bd. of Equalization, 858 F.2d 1376, 1380 (9th Cir. 1988). A
11 federal court is presumed to lack subject matter jurisdiction
12 until the contrary affirmatively appears. Stock W., Inc. v.
13 Confederated Tribes, 873 F.2d 1221, 1225 (9th Cir. 1989).

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15 A Rule 12(b)(1) motion may either attack the sufficiency of
16 the pleadings to establish federal jurisdiction, or allege an
17 actual lack of jurisdiction which exists despite the formal
18 sufficiency of the complaint. Thornhill Publ'g Co. v. Gen. Tel. &
19 Elecs. Corp., 594 F.2d 730, 733 (9th Cir. 1979); Roberts v.
20 Corrothers, 812 F.2d 1173, 1177 (9th Cir. 1987). "In support of a
21 motion to dismiss under Rule 12(b)(1), the moving party may submit
22 affidavits or any other evidence properly before the court . . .
23 It then becomes necessary for the party opposing the motion to
24 present affidavits or any other evidence necessary to satisfy its
25 burden of establishing that the court, in fact, possesses subject
26 matter jurisdiction." Colwell v. Dept. of Health and Human
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1 Services, 558 F.3d 1112, 1121 (9th Cir. 2009) (internal citations
2 omitted); Savage v. Glendale Union High Sch., 343 F.3d 1036, 1039
3 n.2 (9th Cir. 2003). The court enjoys broad authority to order
4 discovery, consider extrinsic evidence, and hold evidentiary
5 hearings in order to determine its own jurisdiction. Rosales v.
6 United States, 824 F.2d 799, 803 (9th Cir. 1987).

7
8 Dismissal under Rule 12(b)(6) for failure to state a claim is
9 appropriate only when the complaint does not give the defendant
10 fair notice of a legally cognizable claim and the grounds on which
11 it rests. Bell Atl. Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007).
12 A complaint must contain a "short and plain statement of the claim
13 showing that the pleader is entitled to relief." Fed. R. Civ. P.
14 8(a).

15
16 In considering whether the complaint is sufficient to state a
17 claim, the court will take all material allegations as true and
18 construe them in the light most favorable to the plaintiff. NL
19 Indus., Inc. v. Kaplan, 792 F.2d 896, 898 (9th Cir. 1986).

20 However, this principle is inapplicable to legal conclusions;
21 "threadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action,
22 supported by mere conclusory statements," are not taken as true.
23 Ashcroft v. Iqbal, ___ U.S. ___, 129 S. Ct. 1937, 1949-50 (2009)
24 (citing Twombly, 550 U.S. at 555).

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26 DISCUSSION

27 Moving Defendants argue that Plaintiffs' notice letters,
28 which are attached to Plaintiffs' First Amended Complaint, are

1 insufficient to support the Court's subject matter jurisdiction to
2 hear Plaintiffs' claims under the Clean Water Act. Title 33
3 U.S.C. § 1365(a) states that

4 any citizen may commence a civil action on his own
5 behalf--(1) against any person . . . who is alleged to
6 be in violation of (A) an effluent standard or
7 limitation under this chapter or (B) an order issued
by the Administrator or a State with respect to such a
standard or limitation[.]

8 In turn, 33 U.S.C. § 1365(b) requires the plaintiff to give notice
9 of the alleged violation to any alleged violator of the standard,
10 limitation, or order, at least sixty days prior to commencement of
11 such a citizen's action. Section 1365(b) further states, "Notice
12 under this subsection shall be given in such a manner as the
13 Administrator shall prescribe by regulation."
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15 The prescribed regulation, 40 C.F.R. § 135.3(a) provides,
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17 Notice regarding an alleged violation of an effluent
18 standard or limitation or of an order with respect
19 thereto, shall include sufficient information to
20 permit the recipient to identify the specific
21 standard, limitation, or order alleged to have been
22 violated, the activity alleged to constitute a
violation, the person or persons responsible for the
alleged violation, the location of the alleged
violation, the date or dates of such violation, and
the full name, address, and telephone number of the
person giving notice.

23 The Supreme Court has required the strict application of the
24 notice requirements under this provision. Hallstrom v. Tillamook
25 County, 493 U.S. 20, 26-29 (1989) ("[T]he legislative history
26 indicates an intent to strike a balance between encouraging
27 citizen enforcement of environmental regulations and avoiding
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1 burdening the federal courts with excessive numbers of citizen
2 suits.")

3 Plaintiffs filed suit on August 31, 2010. Their original
4 complaint attached a Section 1365 notice letter dated February 17,
5 2010. Subsequently, Plaintiffs filed their First Amended
6 Complaint, which included the February 17, 2010 notice letter, and
7 another notice letter dated September 2, 2010. FAC, Exs. A & B.
8 The September 2, 2010 notice letter generally mirrors the content
9 of the earlier notice letter, except that it names, in addition to
10 Aboudi, Defendant City of Oakland, Defendant agencies and their
11 presiding officials, and it omits certain businesses and their
12 owners named in the previous notice letter.

14 I. Aboudi's Individual Liability

15 The first defect Moving Defendants assert is the purported
16 failure to address Aboudi as an individual. Because the letters
17 refer to Aboudi in his official capacity as president and a
18 registered agent for OMSS, Moving Defendants contend that Aboudi
19 was not properly notified as an individual. Both letters clearly
20 identify Aboudi, repeating his name three times on the first page
21 in relation to three separate addresses. The first and fourth
22 paragraphs in the February 17, 2010 letter give notice to Aboudi
23 as an owner, officer or operator responsible for the alleged
24 violations at the OMSS facility. Likewise, the first and fourth
25 paragraphs in the September 2, 2010 letter identify and notify
26 Aboudi as a person responsible for the violations. Section V in
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1 both letters names Aboudi as a person responsible for the alleged
2 violations, stating, "River Watch puts . . . William Aboudi [and
3 others]. . . on notice that they are the persons responsible for
4 the violations described above." Title 40 C.F.R. § 135.5(a)
5 simply requires "sufficient information to permit the recipient to
6 identify . . . the person or persons responsible for the alleged
7 violation."
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9 Moving Defendants argue that the allegations are insufficient
10 to pierce the corporate veil, and therefore the Court may not
11 exercise jurisdiction over Aboudi personally. This argument,
12 however, fails to recognize that, under the Clean Water Act,
13 penalties may be imposed against individuals who are in positions
14 of authority at polluting companies. Humboldt Baykeeper v.
15 Simpson Timber Co., 2006 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 91667, at *9-10 (N.D.
16 Cal.) (citing 33 U.S.C. §§ 1319(c)(2),(6)) (imposing liability on
17 "any person who . . . knowingly violates" the Clean Water Act
18 including "any responsible corporate officer."); see United States
19 v. Iverson, 162 F.3d 1015, 1022-26 (9th Cir. 1998) ("Under the
20 CWA, a person is a 'responsible corporate officer' if the person
21 has authority to exercise control over the corporation's activity
22 that is causing the discharges. There is no requirement that the
23 officer in fact exercise such authority or that the corporation
24 expressly vest a duty in the officer to oversee the activity.").

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27 Moving Defendants further contend that Plaintiffs have failed
28 to state a claim under Rule 12(b)(6) because the allegations are

1 insufficient to establish Aboudi's individual liability on an
2 alter ego theory. For the reasons explained above, it is
3 unnecessary for Plaintiffs to demonstrate a unity of interest
4 between OMSS and Aboudi to state a claim against him as an
5 individual.

6 II. Notice of Dates

7 Moving Defendants assert a second defect in the allegations.
8 They contend that the Court lacks subject matter jurisdiction over
9 Plaintiffs' claims due to inadequate notice in the First Amended
10 Complaint and the notice letters of the dates of the alleged
11 violations.
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13 Moving Defendants rely heavily on Washington Trout v. McCain
14 Foods, Inc., where the plaintiffs' notice did not identify
15 specific dates of the purported violations, but alleged that
16 "[t]his pollution is substantial, longstanding, continuing, and
17 unpermitted by the NPDES." 45 F.3d 1351, 1352 (9th Cir. 1995).
18 The Ninth Circuit did not reach the issue of whether the notice
19 letter adequately informed the alleged polluters of the violation
20 dates. Id. at 1352 n.2 ("Plaintiffs argue that by stating in
21 their notice that the 'pollution is substantial, longstanding, and
22 continuing' they have complied with the regulation's requirement
23 of specifying the dates of the violation. Because of our
24 resolution of the case on other grounds, we need not reach this
25 issue."). Instead, the court found inadequate notice because the
26 letter failed to give the identity and contact information of the
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1 plaintiffs. Thus, the case does not stand for the proposition
2 that notice of dates more specific than that given in Trout is
3 mandatory under 33 U.S.C. § 1365(b) and 40 C.F.R. § 135.3(a).

4 There are eight causes of action in Plaintiffs' First Amended
5 Complaint, and Plaintiffs have given sufficient notice of the
6 dates of the alleged violations in all of them. The notice
7 regulation does not require plaintiffs to "'list every specific
8 aspect or detail of every alleged violation.'" San Francisco
9 BayKeeper, 309 F.3d at 1158 (citing Community Ass'n for
10 Restoration of the Environment v. Henry Bosma Dairy, 305 F.3d 943,
11 949 (9th Cir. 2002)). "Notice is sufficient if it is reasonably
12 specific and if it gives 'the accused company the opportunity to
13 correct the problem.'" Waterkeepers Northern California v. AG
14 Industrial Mfg., Inc., 375 F.3d 913, 917 (9th Cir. 2004) (citing
15 San Francisco BayKeeper, 309 F.3d at 1158).

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18 Plaintiffs have alleged and given notice of the following
19 "continuous" and "ongoing" violations from the date OMSS began
20 operating the facility, on or about August 7, 2006: (1) failure to
21 secure a NPEDS permit prior to discharging pollutants into waters
22 of the United States (First and Second Causes of Action);
23 (2) failure to develop and implement a Storm Water Pollution
24 Prevention Plan (Fifth Cause of Action); (3) failure to collect
25 and analyze storm water samples (Sixth Cause of Action);
26 (4) failure to submit timely Annual Reports and reports of non-
27 compliance with the General Industrial Storm Water Permit to the
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1 San Francisco Bay Regional Water Quality Board (Seventh Cause of
2 Action); and (5) failure to implement the best technology
3 available that is economically achievable (BAT) and the best
4 conventional pollutant control technology (BCT) (Eighth Cause of
5 Action). More specific dates are not required for these
6 particular allegations. San Francisco BayKeeper, 309 F.3d at 1158
7 ("Where BayKeeper alleged an ongoing violation of Tosco's
8 obligation to implement best available technology to prevent storm
9 water pollution, no specific dates were needed.").

11 The Third Cause of Action alleges the unlawful discharge of
12 storm waters containing pollutants into the Bay. The notice
13 letters assert that the violations:

14 have occurred and will occur on every significant rain
15 event that has occurred since at least August 7, 2006
16 or any earlier date by which OMSS began operating the
17 facility . . . Exhibit A, attached hereto, sets forth
18 specific rain dates on which [the complaining parties
allege] that OMSS has discharged storm water
containing pollutants in violation of the Act . . .

19 Both notice letters attach lists specifying rain dates at the Port
20 of Oakland in Oakland, California. The information compares
21 favorably with the rainfall tables that the Ninth Circuit accepted
22 in Waterkeepers, 375 F.3d at 917-18 (reversing district court
23 decision that rainfall tables did not provide adequate notice of
24 dates of the alleged violations). When the relevant sentences are
25 read as a whole, and with Exhibit A, Moving Defendants'
26 objections, parsing the words "significant rain event" compared to
27 "rain event," are not reason to find that notice was inadequate.
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1 The large number of dates simply indicates many rain dates when
2 the violations are alleged to have occurred.

3 Plaintiffs' Fourth Cause of Action alleges unlawful
4 discharges of polluted non-storm waters into the San Francisco
5 Bay. The notices indicate that the violations occurred "on each
6 date on which the facility has discharged non-storm water
7 including fuel, oil and grease, rinse water, wash water, urine, or
8 other wastes to the storm drains at the facility." Plaintiffs
9 allege that these discharges have been ongoing since Moving
10 Defendants began operating the facility. No specific dates are
11 identified. Notice in this manner is reasonably specific because
12 the alleged violations are clearly identified, providing Moving
13 Defendants with an opportunity to fix the problem, if one exists.
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15 The Ninth Circuit decision in San Francisco BayKeeper guides
16 this result. There the plaintiff alleged that the defendants
17 illegally discharged petroleum coke into a slough by storing large
18 uncovered piles of the pollutant at a particular facility, a
19 method of storage that allowed coke to be carried into the slough
20 by wind and rain. 309 F.3d at 1155-56. The plaintiff further
21 alleged that the defendants' careless loading methods caused coke
22 to spill into the slough. The plaintiff provided a few specific
23 dates when alleged spillage occurred, based on records of when
24 ships were loading, and provided no exact dates for when the coke
25 blew or flowed into the slough. Nevertheless, the court found
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1 that there was adequate notice of the dates in relation to both
2 sets of allegations. The court explained that

3 the key language in the notice regulation is the
4 phrase "sufficient information to permit the recipient
5 to identify" the alleged violations and bring itself
6 into compliance. Notice is sufficient if it is
specific enough "to give the accused company the
opportunity to correct the problem."

7 Id. at 1158 (internal citations omitted). Here, the notice
8 letters were specific enough to inform Moving Defendants of the
9 nature of the alleged violations, as well as the dates when those
10 violations likely occurred. Moving Defendants are in a position
11 to know when non-storm waters were discharged, if at all, into the
12 storm drains because they operate the facility, and, presumably,
13 are aware of and in communication with all of the businesses and
14 individuals using the facility.

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16 CONCLUSION

17 Because the Court finds that notice was sufficient to inform
18 Aboudi of his individual liability, and to state the dates of the
19 alleged violations, the Court denies Moving Defendants' motion to
20 dismiss. Docket No. 13.

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22 IT IS SO ORDERED.

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24 Dated: 2/14/2011

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CLAUDIA WILKEN
United States District Judge