



PRESS RELEASE

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CHAIRWOMAN VARGAS AND VICE CHAIR LAWSON-REMER LEAD EFFORTS TO DECLARE STATE OF EMERGENCY DUE TO SEWAGE POLLUTING REGION'S BEACHES, OCEANS

*Declaration by Chairwoman Vargas, Vice Chair Lawson-Remer Also Requests
Governor, Federal Government Declare Emergency*

San Diego – The County Board of Supervisors voted unanimously today to declare a County-wide state of emergency as pollution and sewage continue to flow across the U.S.-Mexico border, contaminating local ocean water and several beaches.

The resolution declaring an environmental and public health crisis, introduced by Chairwoman Nora Vargas and Vice Chair Terra Lawson-Remer, also requests that the Governor and the President proclaim a state of emergency, suspend red tape that may hinder response efforts, and expedite access to federal resources for San Diego County. This is the same process recently followed by local agencies to resolve the water quality crisis in Flint, Michigan.

“Since I joined the County Board of Supervisors, I have made this a top priority, and now it’s time for the Federal Government to prioritize this issue and provide additional support to bring clean water to the families and visitors of South County,” said San Diego County Chairwoman Nora Vargas. “I am proud to lead these efforts and for the first time in the history of a decades-long problem, declare a local state of emergency for an issue that has disproportionately impacted our communities. Enough is enough!”

The supervisors also requested that the governor request a federal emergency declaration for San Diego County and that the president award any and all appropriate federal assistance.

“As a surfer and a mom, I am appalled that every day nearly 35 million gallons of sewage continues to flow into our ocean from across our southern border, poisoning our coastline. This is unacceptable,” said Vice Chair Terra Lawson-Remer. “We’ve put up with the Tijuana sewage crisis for far too long. We’re calling upon the Biden Administration to declare a federal emergency and put a stop to this environmental injustice.”

Chairwoman Nora Vargas represents the border communities in South County including Imperial Beach, a community that for decades has been devastated by the Tijuana River Valley environmental crisis. She has been advocating for clean water in South County since she joined the County Board of Supervisors and is committed to continue uplifting this issue at the local, state, and federal level.

Vice Chair Lawson-Remer represents over 30 miles of San Diego County’s iconic coastline from Carlsbad to the City of Coronado, the communities highly impacted by the transboundary pollution. She’s long been an advocate for environmental infrastructure improvements and clean water in the region.

The declaration included directions to San Diego County’s Chief Administrative Officer to assess the economic impacts resulting from the U.S.-Mexico border transboundary pollution environmental crisis and provide a report to the board within 120 days, outlining the extent of the economic consequences. County supervisors also directed staff to actively pursue all available federal and state funding sources that can contribute to addressing the transboundary pollution environmental crisis.

For several decades, the Tijuana River has caused immense devastation to the coastlines and beaches of San Diego County, resulting in contamination and pollution. Extensive documentation by the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) reveals that since 2018, more than 100 billion gallons of toxic effluent have entered the United States through the Tijuana River. Additionally, an alarming 35 billion gallons have crossed the international border flowing north from another broken sewage treatment plant in Punta Bandera, since December 28, 2022. This new source of pollution is now impacting the San Diego coastline during the summer months due to the south swell.

The continuous influx of transboundary sewage has profoundly affected our communities, leading to severe consequences in terms of public health, economic stability, and environmental well-being. Consequently, the impact can be seen in the prolonged closure of the South side of Imperial Beach for over 550 consecutive days due to the persistently poor water quality.

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