



# County of Santa Cruz

## BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

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October 24, 2023

The Honorable Brenda Mallory  
Council on Environmental Quality  
730 Jackson Place NW  
Washington, DC 20503

### **Re: Tijuana River Transboundary Pollution**

Dear Chair Mallory,

In my capacity as Chair of the Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors, I am writing to express the Board's unanimous support for a Federal Emergency Declaration to address the mounting environmental and public health crisis faced by South San Diego communities due to Tijuana River Transboundary Pollution. This Emergency Declaration is urgently needed to provide critical resources, specifically for mitigating sewage flows through repairs and upgrades to the South Bay International Treatment Plant (ITP).

The Tijuana River has been a long-standing source of concern due to cross-border flows, carrying a significant amount of untreated sewage, industrial waste, and other pollutants from the Tijuana area into the Pacific Ocean, which ultimately impacts communities in Southern California. The pollution from these flows poses a severe threat to public health and safety, the environment, access to coastal resources, and the economic well-being of southern coastal communities heavily reliant on tourism and outdoor activities. The City of Imperial Beach, a low-income and historically disadvantaged community, has been particularly affected, raising significant environmental justice concerns. As of Monday October 23rd, the community has endured 692 consecutive days of beach closure and is now considered the most polluted stretch of sandy beach in the entire country. Additionally, the pollution impacts the naval base in nearby Coronado, impacting operations and posing risks for military families using the surrounding beaches.

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The crisis has been exacerbated by underinvestment and subsequent failures at the ITP, which now affects over 750,000 residents and countless visitors. In response, the San Diego County Board of Supervisors declared a Local Emergency in July 2023. Southern coastal communities are grappling with an unprecedented crisis that extends beyond the realm of local control. A Federal Emergency Declaration for the Tijuana River is desperately needed to address this ongoing crisis. Similar to how federal agencies and resources are mobilized to respond to natural disasters like hurricanes, a Federal Emergency Declaration would enable the coordination and allocation of critical resources to address this crisis.

Over the past decade, local agencies have worked in close partnership with federal agencies to develop comprehensive solutions for the ongoing pollution crisis in the Tijuana River. Collaborative efforts have resulted in an initial allocation of \$300 million through the United States, Mexico, and Canada Agreement (USMCA) to identify and implement a comprehensive approach to solving the longstanding pollution problem in the Tijuana River. The EPA has already prepared a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and identified the preferred list of projects necessary to ultimately control the discharge of wastewater, trash, and sedimentation into the Tijuana River Valley. Unfortunately, more funding and coordinated efforts between state and federal agencies are desperately needed to move these projects forward.

We consider the protection of the California coast and its coastal communities as a shared responsibility. In conjunction with the request from Mayors representing cities within San Diego County, we respectfully request the Administration consider declaring a Federal Emergency to address this profound environmental and public health crisis.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



ZACH FRIEND, Chair  
Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors

ZF:cs