



February 16, 2024

The Honorable President Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington DC, 20500

Dear Mr. President,

We would like to express our gratitude for the opportunity to meet with your White House staff on January 30th to discuss the pressing pollution crisis affecting the Tijuana River and its impact on the coastal border communities in California. During our discussion, we emphasized the critical need to allocate \$310 million for the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) in the current budget cycle, to facilitate the repair and expansion of the International Wastewater Treatment Plant. Additionally, we underscored the importance for a comprehensive strategy from the White House to address pollution control projects along the Tijuana River, encompassing the capture and treatment of cross-border pollution, trash management, and flood control in the river valley. Finally, we discussed the recent package of letters from local school children in Imperial Beach expressing their concerns regarding this issue. We kindly request your staff's response to these letters, which we can share with the community.

The federal response to the Tijuana River pollution crisis has been sluggish, hampered by the complexities inherent in implementing projects along an international border. Therefore, we firmly believe that the implementation of any federal pollution control projects must be prioritized in terms of funding, expedited permitting reviews, and expedited procurement and construction contracts. Local agencies have already declared a state of emergency regarding the Tijuana River pollution crisis, and there is widespread support for a national declaration of emergency by the Federal government (Attachment 1).

We are appreciative that the President's proposed budget includes \$310 million for the IBWC, as this funding is pivotal for the current solicitation for a design-build contract to repair and expand the IBWC treatment plant (Attachment 2). Failure to secure this funding from Congress this year would lead to delays, increased costs, ongoing beach closures, ongoing public health threats, economic impacts and non-compliance with the Clean Water Act. It is also equally important to recognize that remaining projects identified by the Environmental Protection Agency to control pollution in the Tijuana River, still remain largely unfunded, but are equally important for a long-term solution to control cross-border pollution, which is why **a larger strategy is needed to urgently implement these projects.**

What is urgently required from the White House is formal recognition and declaration to coordinate a multi-agency response for the implementation of identified pollution control projects outlined in the EPA's Comprehensive Solution (Attachment 3). We commend the ongoing efforts of EPA Administrator Michael Regan, IBWC Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner, and U.S. Ambassador to Mexico Ken Salazar in supporting a comprehensive plan for the Tijuana River and negotiating high-level agreements with Mexico in its favor. We urge the White House to explore additional avenues to expedite the implementation of these projects specifically aimed at controlling pollution within the United States. We hope that Vice President Kamala Harris and EPA Administrator Michael Regan will consider visiting the area again to announce new efforts to accelerate pollution control projects in the Tijuana River.

Without decisive action from the White House, pollutants in the Tijuana River will continue to wreak havoc, adversely affecting the environment, public health, tourism, and the communities and federal agencies in the region. The deteriorating wastewater infrastructure in Tijuana and at the U.S. IBWC's International Wastewater Treatment Plant has resulted in over two years of continuous beach closures due to sewage contamination in Imperial Beach. A recent White Paper by local researchers clearly documents the emerging public health crisis at the border, with alarming evidence of illnesses caused by harmful viruses, bacteria, and toxic chemicals in water and air (Attachment 4). This crisis is affecting Border Patrol agents, Navy SEAL recruits, Imperial Beach Lifeguards, and local residents including immuno-compromised residents, children, and low-income people with nowhere else to go. We urgently request the White House to elevate these emerging public health concerns to the Center for Disease Control and explore potential resources for our local Public Health Office to protect citizens through the deployment of indoor HEPA filters.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We urge the White House to recognize the severity and urgency of the pollution crisis in the Tijuana River and take decisive action to address it. The allocation of funds, expedited permitting processes, and coordinated multi-agency efforts are crucial steps in mitigating the adverse impacts on the environment, public health, and communities in the region. We stand ready to collaborate and support any initiatives aimed at resolving this pressing issue and look forward to continued engagement and progress toward a sustainable solution.

Sincerely,



Paloma Aguirre
Mayor
City of Imperial Beach



John McCann
Mayor
City of Chula Vista



John Duncan
Councilmember
City of Coronado

Attachments

1. Tijuana River Emergency Sample Letters
2. IBWC Solicitation for a Design Build Contract
3. EPA Comprehensive Solution for the Tijuana River
4. Tijuana River Public Health White Paper