

PRESS RELEASE

Contact Information:

Brenda Arguelles

E-mail: BArguelles@imperialbeachca.gov



CITY OF
**IMPERIAL
BEACH, CA**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Tuesday, September 3, 2024

Mayor Paloma Aguirre Calls on Governor Newsom to Join the California Legislature in Asking President Biden for a National Emergency Declaration After 1,000 Days of Continuous Beach Closures

Request follows Governor Newsom’s State of Emergency Declaration Made for Landslides Impacting the Affluent Community of Rancho Palos Verdes

IMPERIAL BEACH, CA – Mayor Paloma Aguirre of Imperial Beach has issued a public appeal to Governor Gavin Newsom, calling on him to join the 120 California Legislators in their call to President Biden to declare a state of emergency due to the billions of gallons a month of harmful pollution fouling south San Diego’s air and coast. After three years of continuous sewage flows, communities in south San Diego County, particularly Imperial Beach, are confronting an unprecedented environmental and public health emergency.

Mayor Aguirre also highlighted a frustrating disparity in the state’s response to different crises. “While we recognize the recent declaration of a state of emergency in Rancho Palos Verdes to assist 300 affluent residents affected by shifting land, it is deeply frustrating that a similar level of urgency has not been applied to the ongoing sewage crisis in the Tijuana River, which impacts the health and safety of 750,000 people in south San Diego County,” she stated. “The Governor’s leadership in recognizing the severity of pollution in the Tijuana River as a national emergency is crucial for prioritizing immediate mitigating actions to protect public health and expedite infrastructure projects to help stem the flow of pollution.”

This week marks 1,000 consecutive days of beach closures due to sewage contamination from the Tijuana River. With over 60 million gallons of sewage flowing daily, the crisis has reached a tipping point, devastating public access to the coastline and threatening the health and safety of local residents.

“Our communities feel abandoned by the Governor’s administration,” said Mayor Aguirre. “Local officials have been advocating for a comprehensive solution for decades, but we can no longer shoulder this burden alone. It’s time for the State of California to step up and support our demand for the White House to declare this a national emergency.”

The severity of the situation has drawn the attention of leading research institutions, including UC San Diego, San Diego State University, UC Riverside, UT Austin, and the National Center for Atmospheric Research. These institutions are actively monitoring the aerosolization of pathogens, viruses, chemicals, and gases from the Tijuana River. Preliminary findings, combined with alarming spikes in respiratory illnesses, have finally begun to draw the attention of state and federal health officials. The persistent sewage odors are more than just a nuisance—they represent a significant public health threat.

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Mayor Aguirre asserts that the State of California has the power to influence the planning, implementation, and timeline of a comprehensive infrastructure solution for the Tijuana River. While the recent announcement by the International Boundary and Water Commission awarding a contract to rehabilitate and expand the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant is a positive step, the proposed federal timeline of up to five years to repair and expand the international treatment plant is simply unacceptable. Even more concerning is that federal officials are only now beginning discussions on a new and critical project that would capture and treat the flows from the Tijuana River, the primary source of pollution.

“Imperial Beach and residents in south San Diego County are slowly being poisoned by this crisis, and our voices are not enough,” Mayor Aguirre continued. “We need the state to stand with us and demand a comprehensive solution. Assembly Joint Resolution 12, which addresses cross-border pollution in the Tijuana River, is a critical effort that we hope Governor Newsom will support. We also urge the Governor to issue a resolution calling this a state of emergency and leverage his office’s political influence to expedite federal processes and ensure swift implementation of projects along the border.”

Mayor Aguirre concluded her appeal by emphasizing that it is not too late for Governor Newsom to make a difference. “It takes state leadership to cut to the core of the broken federal process that allows 60 million gallons a day of Tijuana sewage to contaminate the coastline of our beautiful state. How much damage does my community need to suffer until this issue gets the attention it deserves?”

For further information, please contact:

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