



Mayor Paloma Aguirre and Members of Tijuana River Pollution Task Force Request Emergency Assistance from County Officials, Air Pollution Control District, State Agencies Due to Hazardous Conditions

Request follows recent discovery of dangerous levels of Hydrogen Sulfide, Sulfur Dioxide, and other toxic gases prompting researchers to pull out of monitoring and data collection

IMPERIAL BEACH, CA – Mayor Paloma Aguirre of Imperial Beach and members of the Tijuana River Pollution Task Force have sent a formal letter requesting emergency assistance addressed to the County Board of Supervisors, the Air Pollution Control District, and the California Department of Public Health. Late last week, researchers pulled out of continuing to monitor toxic gases due to dangerous, “concerningly high” unsafe conditions, [as reported by the San Diego Union-Tribune](#).

The letter requests immediate action regarding dangerous gases impacting neighborhoods in South San Diego County including Nestor, Tijuana River Valley, San Ysidro, and Imperial Beach, as well as the Sweetwater High and South Bay Union School Districts. The letter also includes requests to:

- Distribute appropriate air filters and purifiers to all residents in affected areas prioritizing immunocompromised, elderly, and families with young children;
- Take necessary health measures to ensure health and wellbeing of impacted students, teachers, and staff at impacted schools;
- Request the installation of fully-calibrated instruments for accurate particle and gas monitors;
- Placement of advisory signs in areas throughout the Tijuana River Valley to caution recreationists of toxic gas exposure.

“As Mayor of Imperial Beach, I stand with the affected communities that have suffered for far too long from the devastating impact of toxic gases and pollution caused by the ongoing Tijuana River crisis. Our families, children, seniors and the immunocompromised are constantly at risk, breathing in harmful toxic gases that no one should have to endure. We are fighting not just for our health but for our right to clean air and a safe environment. It is unacceptable that the agencies responsible for protecting our communities continue to drag their feet while we bear the brunt of their inaction. We need swift, comprehensive action—NOW,” said Mayor Aguirre. “We need resources, we need stronger voices, we need relentless and bold leadership, we need your help. 400 air filters distributed via lottery for approximately 30,000 homes, is not enough.”

Last week also marked a grim milestone surpassing 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. A Robotics Emergency Deployment (RED) Team provided by the Austin Fire Department from Texas is being flown in to assist with this 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.

“The air quality from harmful pollutants in the Tijuana River is causing a public health crisis in our region with the current heatwave only exacerbating the health threats. There have been multiple reports from community members of headaches, respiratory symptoms, and nausea as well as the unbearable stench from the toxic gases, which include hydrogen sulfide and VOCs, especially in the nighttime hours. With funding support from the Prebys Foundation we are bringing in a specialized drone hazmat team from the Austin Fire Department in Texas to collect critical air and water samples in partnership with Dr. Prather’s UCSD team and others. We will target the ‘hotspots’ that the UCSD team has identified. This will help us to better understand the full scope of the threat and provide critical data needed to protect our communities,” said Dr. Paula Granados, leading researcher from San Diego State University’s School of Public Health.

Preliminary findings, combined with alarming spikes in respiratory illnesses, have finally begun to draw the attention of state and federal health officials. The persistent toxic gases are more than just a nuisance—they represent a significant public health threat.

“We’ve brought together top scientists in a major field project in the South Bay area to study how the Tijuana River’s poor water quality is degrading air quality, leading to persistent odors and health issues. The community’s experiences are our best guide; we must listen and act swiftly to protect their health,” says Dr. Kim Prather, a distinguished chair in atmospheric chemistry and professor at Scripps Oceanography and UCSD’s Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry. “Our data show high pollution levels that validate residents’ concerns. While others work on critical infrastructure changes to clean the Tijuana River—where millions of gallons of raw sewage are flowing into the ocean near Imperial Beach—we need immediate action to filter indoor air, where exposure is highest at night. Just as we filter water, we must filter the air inside our homes to provide short-term relief while long-term solutions are developed.”

For further information, please contact:

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