

September 8, 2024

Honorable Councilmember Jack Shu
Chair
San Diego County Air Pollution Control District
Board of Directors
10124 Old Grove Rd, San Diego, CA 92131

Honorable Supervisor Nora Vargas
Chair
County of San Diego Board of Supervisors
1600 Pacific Highway, San Diego CA 92101

RE: Concerns Regarding High Levels of Toxic Gases in District 1 & Request for Immediate Action

Honorable Chairs,

We are reaching out to you in your role as Chair of the Board of Supervisors and of APCD's Governing Board. We are extremely concerned in light of the preliminary findings of Dr. Prather's team regarding dangerous gases impacting communities in District 1, including Nestor, Tijuana River Valley, San Ysidro, and Imperial Beach, as well as the Sweetwater High and Southbay Union School Districts.

We are reaching out with the following requests:

1. Stop sharing APCD sensor data and potentially erroneous conclusions until their instruments are fully calibrated and producing accurate readings. This gives a false sense of security to the community. Work with Dr. Prather's team to identify more effective locations to gather samples based on their preliminary findings.
2. Suspend distribution of the Syndromic Surveillance Bulletin until it includes comprehensive information including community health clinic or private clinicians' data from both the Southbay and Tijuana. Using the Emergency Department and "chief complaint" only data misses a significant portion of the affected population and does not account for people who have no health insurance, who cross the border into Tijuana for healthcare, or who seek a lower level of care (ie PCP, pediatrician, or urgent care). The "chief complaint" is often not the true diagnosis.
3. Distribute, as soon as possible, appropriate air filters/purifiers that are effective in removing the pollutants, which include both particulate matter as well as gases to all residents in the affected areas. APCD must consult with Dr. Prather and her team of experts at UCSD on correct filters to ensure public health measures are being met. Immunocompromised, elderly, and families with young children should be prioritized. Immediately distribute KN-95 masks to the affected areas identified by Dr. Prather's preliminary findings. Dr. Prather is a world leading authority on the matter and can make recommendations on the types and models.

4. Take all necessary measures, including distribution of appropriate air filters/purifiers, to ensure the health of the students, teachers, and staff from Berry Elementary, Nestor Language Academy, and Southwest High School is protected.

5. Install calibrated particle and gas monitors to determine the safety of outdoor activity at all schools and the Tijuana River Valley Sports Complex. Regulate youth/adult sports and outdoor activities, allowing the data to drive decision making.

6. Place advisory signs in areas throughout the Tijuana River Valley to caution recreationists of the risk of exposure to Hydrogen Sulfide, Sulfur Dioxide, and other toxic gases.

The urgency of this situation can not be overstated. We ask for immediate intervention and implementation of these requests by the County Office of Emergency Management, Air Pollution Control District, and Health and Human Services.

Sincerely,

The Members of the Tijuana River Pollution Task Force

Paloma Aguirre
City of Imperial Beach Mayor

Courtney Baltiyskyy
YMCA Camp Surf Imperial Beach

Lauren Cazares
San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce

Ramon Chairez
Un Mar De Colores

Dr. Tom Csanadi
Pediatrician & Imperial Beach Resident

Sarah Davidson
Surfrider San Diego

Drs. Kimberly and Matt Dickson
Southbay Urgent Care & Imperial Beach Residents

Dr. Paula S. Granados
School of Public Health
San Diego State University

Dr. Marvel Harrison
Psychologist & Imperial Beach Resident

Waylon Matson
4 Walls International

Philip Musegaas
San Diego Coastkeeper

Dr. Kimberly Prather
Scripps Institution of Oceanography at UCSD

Laura Wilkinson Sinton
Stop the Sewage.org & Coronado Resident

CC:

San Diego County Board of Supervisors
San Diego County Air Pollution Control District Governing Board
Dr. Tomas Aragon California Department of Public Health
San Diego County Department Health and Human Services of HHS
San Diego County Department of Environmental Health and Quality
San Diego County Air Pollution Control District Executive Director
Sweetwater Union High School District Superintendent
Southbay Union High School District Superintendent
University of California San Diego Chancellor
San Diego State University President