

PRESS RELEASE

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CITY OF
**IMPERIAL
BEACH, CA**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
Wednesday, October 16, 2024

California Coastal Commission Votes Unanimously to Support State of Emergency Declaration for Ongoing Pollution Crisis in Tijuana River

*Commissioner Aguirre leads discussion on advocating for State of Emergency declaration
to Biden Administration from Coastal Commission*

IMPERIAL BEACH, CA – The California Coastal Commission voted unanimously to send a letter to the Biden Administration requesting a federal State of Emergency declaration to address the escalating environmental and public health crisis caused by ongoing pollution in the Tijuana River. The decisive vote follows declaration requests made in recent weeks by the San Diego City Council, the California Legislature, and San Diego County’s congressional delegation.

For decades, pollution from sewage, toxic waste, and debris flowing into the Tijuana River has severely impacted the southern San Diego coastline resulting in beach closures, health risks for communities, and harmful effects on marine ecosystems.

Coastal Commission Chair Caryl Hart credited Mayor Aguirre for her leadership and emphasized the importance of swift action during her remarks stating, “I want to align myself with everything that’s been said including the incredible gratitude for everything that Commissioner Aguirre has done at her own personal expense.” Chair Hart continued, “Everyone in Imperial Beach is feeling the impacts of this situation. It should be all-hands-on-deck on this very, very serious situation. It’s a crisis – an absolute crisis.”

Imperial Beach Mayor Paloma Aguirre, who also serves as the San Diego Coast Representative on the California Coastal Commission, led discussion on the item at the Coastal Commission meeting which was held at the Catamaran Hotel in Pacific Beach.

“It is the biggest coastal issue in our entire state,” said Mayor Aguirre during her remarks at the commission meeting. “I want to appreciate my colleagues’ support and patience... We cannot be complacent because we may think that we’re powerless, but I would argue we are powerful.”

Recently, Mayor Aguirre sent a letter to White House Chief of Staff Jeff Zients detailing a renewed request for President Biden to declare a federal State of Emergency. The unchecked, ongoing contamination of the Tijuana River continues to negatively impact the health and safety of south San Diego County residents.

“I support the commission sending the strongest language possible that moves us to action on this crisis,” said Alternate Commissioner and San Diego resident Gretchen Newsom. “As a sister of San Diego County on the Coastal Commission, this environmental disaster is adversely affecting hard-

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working families, including as many as 3,000 union members who live in Imperial Beach, and thousands more throughout San Diego’s South bay communities. Every resident in California deserves access to clean air, clean water, and pollution-free recreation areas. This crisis has reached a tipping point.”

The commission’s letter to the Biden Administration will highlight perpetual environmental issues exacerbating the crisis including extreme weather events like heavy rains and severe flooding from earlier this year. The letter will advocate and request a call for immediate, comprehensive solutions in addressing the ongoing environmental crisis.

The Tijuana River has been discharging up to 80 million gallons per day of untreated sewage, industrial waste, and urban runoff, exposing Imperial Beach residents and neighboring communities to high levels of toxic chemicals, pathogens, and harmful gases. Researchers from University of California San Diego and San Diego State University have identified concerning levels of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) that exceeded state standards during nighttime hours. Combined with other volatile organic compounds, the mixture of polluted air and ocean water has been causing a steady increase in respiratory and gastrointestinal ailments and illnesses in local residents.

The California Coastal Commission is a state agency within the California Natural Resources Agency with quasi-judicial control of protecting and enhancing coastal waters for present and future generations through planning and regulation of development, natural resource protection, and public access along the state’s 1,100-mile coastline.

Video from the October 10th Coastal Commission meeting can be found online ([Video: California Coastal Commission- Oct. 10, 2024, 9 a.m. CAL-SPAN](#)). The informational update and commission’s action on trans-boundary pollution in the Tijuana River Valley begins at timecode 01:12:44.

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