



CITY OF IMPERIAL BEACH

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

PALOMA AGUIRRE, MAYOR

825 IMPERIAL BEACH BLVD., IMPERIAL BEACH, CA 91932

TEL: 619.423.8303 | FAX: 619.628.1395

January 22, 2025

Honorable Lee Zeldin
EPA Administrator-Designate
Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

RE: New Review of Tijuana River Valley Toxic Sewage Crisis for Superfund Designation

Dear Mr. Zeldin:

As the EPA's new administrator, I'm asking you to authorize a new review of the Lower Tijuana River Valley's toxic cross-border sewage crisis for Superfund designation. I was heartened by your agreement in your confirmation hearing to CA Senator Schiff's request to review the EPA's recent denial of Superfund designation for this environmental crisis. On behalf of my constituents in Imperial Beach, CA and the entire South County region that is calling out for action on this crisis, I'm asking you today to put those words into action.

The toxic sewage coming across the border from Mexico into South San Diego County is among America's most horrendous public health catastrophes. **Since 2023, over 31 billion gallons of wastewater, including industrial waste, have flowed down the Tijuana River, across the Mexican border into the Tijuana River Valley, through the cities of San Diego and Imperial Beach and into the Pacific Ocean.**

The damage caused by this environmental disaster is immense. Numerous San Diego-area beaches have been closed for over 1,000 days due to contaminated waters. Our local residents and workforce, including Navy Seals training in the area and Border Patrol personnel simply reporting for duty, are literally getting sick from waterborne and aerosolized diseases, including infections, hepatitis and respiratory illness. The economic impact is always front of mind, with the sewage crisis hurting area tourism, maritime industry jobs and local property values.

Just last week, [a new joint study from the federal Centers for Disease Control and County of San Diego highlighted even more alarming public health impacts than previously known.](#) Fully, 71% of residents surveyed believe their tap water is unsafe and nearly 50% of households reported a health symptom caused by the sewage crisis, including headaches, nausea, asthma and lung pain. I'm attaching that report to this letter.



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This crisis is on a par with Flint, Michigan's lead contamination, yet no significant federal action has been taken by the EPA to better understand the legacy pollutants in the soil and water impacted by Tijuana River pollution. Unfortunately, regional EPA staffers recently rejected an initial eligibility request for Superfund's National Priority List. I am asking you, as the new leader of the EPA, to authorize a new review into the Tijuana River Valley's eligibility for Superfund status, incorporating the new data from the CDC's jarring new report into your consideration.

Our communities are calling out for support from their federal government and large-scale clean-up efforts that only Superfund designation can bring to bear. I hope as the new leader of the EPA, you will consider taking new, urgent action to tackle this unacceptable cross-border sewage crisis that is harming so many people and communities.

I would welcome the opportunity for you to visit our region so I can show you this public health, environmental and economic disaster firsthand. I am also available to meet with you and your staff any time and any place so I can share with you my community's urgent concerns and calls for change on the Tijuana River toxic sewage crisis.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to Ryan Trabuco at rtrabuco@imperialbeachca.gov if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Paloma Aguirre
Mayor of Imperial Beach

CC: President Donald Trump
James Payne, EPA Acting Administrator
Gregg Trembl, EPA Acting Deputy Administrator
Cheree Peterson, EPA Acting Region 9 Administrator
Rafael DeLeon, EPA OITA Acting Assistant Administrator
Larry Douchand, EPA OSRTI Director