



CITY OF IMPERIAL BEACH

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

PALOMA AGUIRRE, MAYOR

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March 3, 2025

The Honorable Lee Zeldin
EPA Administrator
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 Environmental Protection Agency'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 and further EPA action.

As the Mayor of Imperial Beach, CA – which has been ground zero for this environmental catastrophe – I was heartened by the commitment you made in your confirmation hearing to reconsider the EPA's recent denial of Superfund designation for this crisis along the US-Mexico border in South County San Diego.

The toxic sewage coming across the border from Mexico into South San Diego County is among America's most horrendous environmental and public health disasters. **Since 2023, over 31 billion gallons of raw sewage, polluted stormwater and trash have flowed across the Mexican border, down the Tijuana River, through the cities of San Diego and Imperial Beach and into the Pacific Ocean.**

The damage caused by this environmental disaster is immense. Some San Diego-area beaches have been closed for over 1,000 days due to contaminated waters. Our residents, are getting ill due to polluted air. Workers, including Navy Seals training in the area, have been sickened on the job by waterborne and aerosolized diseases. Many homeowners have been forced to place air quality monitors on their property so they know whether or not its safe to go outside. And the economic impact is profound, with the sewage crisis hurting area tourism, maritime industry jobs and local property values.



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In January, 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. That report is attached.

Despite all this, regional EPA staffers recently rejected an initial eligibility request for Superfund's National Priority List. The lack of attention and action by our federal government is maddening. We have been ignored and shortchanged by both Democratic and Republican administrations alike and that must change. San Diego County's cross-border sewage crisis is an environmental nightmare on par with Flint, Michigan's lead contamination, and it deserves a fast, muscular federal response.

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 and further EPA action, incorporating the new data from the CDC's jarring new report into consideration.

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

I would welcome the opportunity for you or your team 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 need for action on the Tijuana River toxic sewage crisis.

Please do not hesitate to reach out at rtrabuco@imperialbeachca.gov. Congratulations on your recent appointment and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Paloma Aguirre
Mayor, City of Imperial Beach
825 Imperial Beach Blvd.
Imperial Beach, CA 91932

