



Scenic Pacifica
Incorporated Nov. 22, 1957

CITY OF PACIFICA

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August 31, 2023

The White House
Council of Environmental Quality
722 Jackson Place NW
Washington, DC 20503

Governor Gavin Newsom
Office of the Governor
1303 10th Street, Suite 1173
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Request for State of Emergency for the Tijuana River Transboundary Pollution Crisis

Dear Honorable Chair Brenda Mallory and Governor Gavin Newsom:

As the Mayor of the City of Pacifica, California, and on behalf of the City Council, I write to you with deep concern regarding the severe pollution crisis in the Tijuana River located within San Diego County, California. It is with a sense of urgency that I, along with the request from Mayors representing cities within San Diego County, call upon the Biden-Harris Administration and the State of California to take decisive action to address the severe pollution crisis in the Tijuana River and take a larger role in securing funding, resources, and political will by declaring a State of Emergency for the pollution crisis in the Tijuana River. The Imperial Beach shoreline located in South San Diego County is tragically recognized as the most polluted stretch of sandy beach in the entire country. Pollution in the Tijuana River remains the most urgent environmental justice issue in San Diego County.

I support the request of my counterparts from the cities in San Diego County formally requesting a **Federal Emergency Declaration for the Tijuana River Valley and the shoreline of Imperial Beach** as well as a declaration of a **State of Emergency by the State of California**. The continuous influx of transboundary pollution is wreaking havoc on the community, economy, and environment along the coastline of South San Diego County. Since October 2018, the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission has documented the entry of over 100 billion gallons of toxic effluent into the United States through the Tijuana River, with an additional 35 billion gallons crossing the international border since December 28, alone.¹ This ongoing inundation of sewage creates the most polluted stretch of sandy beach in the entire country. The community of Imperial Beach is bearing the brunt of this environmental disaster with over 600 consecutive days of beach closures due to the ongoing influx of sewage, industrial discharges, and trash from the Tijuana River². Pollution in the Tijuana River remains the most urgent environmental justice issue in San Diego County.

The extent of this pollution has been studied for decades including recent research from the Scripps Institute of Oceanography with funding from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) that attributes

¹ <https://waterdata.ibwc.gov/Data/Dashboard/8>

² <http://www.sdbeachinfo.com/>

34,000 illnesses in calendar year 2017 to water quality pollution along the Imperial Beach coastline³. The high levels of coastal water pollution are even impacting local air quality⁴. Researchers are monitoring the airborne transmission pathways for coastal water pollution and documenting concerning levels of industrial chemicals and pathogens from aerosol sea spray generated from wind and ocean waves⁵. These potential public health concerns are why the Cities of Imperial Beach and San Diego maintain an ongoing State of Local Emergency related to the impacts of cross-border pollution in the Tijuana River. In addition, the County of San Diego has declared a Public Health Crisis for the Tijuana River Valley.

The coastal communities of South San Diego County face an immense challenge from the ongoing pollution crisis in the Tijuana River that is beyond local and state control. It is a public health emergency that requires a State and Federal Emergency Declaration to coordinate and prioritize a multi-agency response to this ongoing disaster. The continuous flow of untreated sewage and other pollutants into our waters is unacceptable and must be addressed immediately.

Over the past decade, local agencies have forged a strong partnership with federal agencies to develop comprehensive solutions for the ongoing pollution crisis in the Tijuana River. Collaborative efforts have resulted in an initial allocation of \$300 million through the United States, Mexico, and Canada Agreement (USMCA) to identify and implement a comprehensive approach to solve the longstanding pollution problem in the Tijuana River. The EPA has already prepared a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and identified the preferred list of projects that are necessary to ultimately control the discharge of wastewater, trash, and sedimentation into the Tijuana River Valley. Unfortunately, more funding together with state and federal agency coordination is needed to move these projects forward.

Just as federal agencies and resources are mobilized to respond to natural disasters like hurricanes, a State and Federal Emergency Declaration for the Tijuana River would enable the coordination and allocation of critical resources to address this ongoing environmental catastrophe. The same level of urgency, funding, and comprehensive action that is applied to other state and national emergencies, whether natural or man-made, must be extended to the pollution crisis in the Tijuana River.

Sincerely,



Tygarjas Twyrlls Bigstycck
Mayor, City of Pacifica

Cc: US Congressman Anna Eshoo
US Congressman Kevin Mullin
California State Senator Josh Becker
California State Assemblymember Marc Berman
CALEPA Secretary Yana Garcia
California Coastal Commission Chair Donne Brownsey
California Coastal Commission Executive Director Kate Huckelbridge
San Mateo County Supervisor Ray Mueller
Paloma Aguirre, Mayor, City of Imperial Beach

³ Falk Feddersen et al. "Modeling Untreated Wastewater Evolution and Swimmer Illness for Four Wastewater Infrastructure Scenarios in the San Diego-Tijuana (US/MX) Border Region" October 28, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.1029/2021GH000490>

⁴ Matthew A. Pendergraft et al. "Airborne Transmission Pathway for Coastal Water Pollution" PeerJ; 2021. <https://peerj.com/articles/11358/>

⁵ Matthew A. Pendergraft et al. "Bacterial and Chemical Evidence of Coastal Water Pollution from the Tijuana River in Sea Spray Aerosol" Environmental Science & Technology; 2023. <https://pubs.acs.org/doi/10.1021/acs.est.2c02312?ref=pdf>