

CITY OF IMPERIAL BEACH TIJUANA RIVER POLLUTION FAQ

Background

The failures in Tijuana's sewage treatment, conveyance, and pump station network have been responsible for the decades of transboundary sewage flows coming through the Tijuana River, which have significantly worsened since 2017. Mexico is currently implementing construction projects as part of the [International Boundary Water Commission Treaty Minute 328](#), which aim to reduce the volume of sewage being discharged into the river.

The South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (IWTP), located in San Ysidro, CA, and administered by the [International Boundary and Water Commission](#) (IBWC), was created to treat sewage from Mexico since the 1990's. The treatment plant is not designed to directly capture all sewage runoff from Tijuana and, when in operation, is not adequately sized to capture the significant amount of transboundary pollution flows that have been occurring over the years. The lack of adequate infrastructure to fully capture all pollution runoff has contributed to systemic failures, increased odors, and prolonged beach closures within the City of Imperial Beach and adjacent communities.

Progress Timeline & Announcements

- In September 2024, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) formally transferred United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) funds to the U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission for the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) Rehabilitation and Expansion Project. For more information and updates on this important project, visit: <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/usmca-tijuana-river-watershed>.
- In May 2025, the IBWC and EPA announced that the incremental expansion of SBIWTP, from existing capacity of 25 million gallons per day (MGD) to 35 MGD, will be fast-tracked to complete in 100 days, rather than the originally projected two years.
- In June 2025, the United States International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) announced that they are exploring further acceleration toward full expansion (50 MGD).
- In July 2025, the United States and Mexico signed a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MOU\)](#) to address the long-running Tijuana River sewage crisis, along with timeline commitments and agency responsibilities. Notable commitments in the MOU include:
 - Mexico to obligate the remaining \$93 million of funds for sewage infrastructure projects under Minute 328
 - Mexico to initiate a broader infrastructure package including the expansion of San Antonio de los Buenos treatment plant and the addition of an ocean outfall
 - U.S. to accelerate the expansion and construction of the International Treatment Plant to 50 million gallons per day by December 2027.
 - Directs the U.S. and Mexico to enter into a new Treaty Minute by December 31, 2025 to specifically address transboundary wastewater management issues, human health concerns, and environmental conditions in the Tijuana River watershed.

Why is the beach closed?

The beach is closed because sewage flows in the Tijuana River are exceptionally high. The IBWC monitors these flows, and you can view their data in the following dashboard:

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

Additionally, although Mexico has recently repaired the San Antonio de los Buenos (SAB) treatment plant, a treatment plant six miles south of the border, exclusively within Mexican jurisdiction, untreated wastewater is often discharged directly into the ocean.

What is causing the smell?

The odors emanating from the Tijuana River Valley are primarily due to both flowing and stagnant sewage water, contaminated and decaying organic material, and environmental conditions that contribute to the pungent smell. Tidal conditions, wind, temperature, and volume of raw sewage all affect the extent and duration of these odors in surrounding areas.

Who has jurisdiction and responsibility over the affected area?

- **Federal:** International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) and Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- **State:** California Governor and Departments under Cal EPA
- **Local (Tijuana River Valley):** San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board; San Diego County Air Pollution Control District; County of San Diego – Parks & Recreation; City of San Diego – Stormwater Department; and Border Field State Park
- **Mexico:** Comisión Estatal de Servicios Públicos de Tijuana (CESPT) and Comisión Internacional de Límites y Aguas (CILA)

What is the solution?

1. Provide and maintain adequate wastewater treatment capacity for Tijuana as the city continues to grow and expand. This includes expanding the International Wastewater Treatment plant and other treatment facilities in Mexico that collectively operate as a regional wastewater collection system.
2. Continue to fund the EPA border program that provides necessary oversight of Tijuana's regional wastewater collection system of sewer pumps, collection pipes, and treatment plants and ensure that these systems are maintained and upgraded over time. This includes the current implementation of Minute 328 projects.
3. Capture and treat any dry weather flows in the Tijuana River before they impact the Tijuana River Valley.
4. Implement water recycling in Mexico to prevent the discharge of any treated effluent back into the Tijuana River.
5. Construct a new ocean outfall for the San Antonio de los Bunos treatment plant.
6. Install trash control and sediment management systems for every major drainage area (Smugglers Gulch, Goat Canyon, and main channel of the Tijuana River).

What is the City of Imperial Beach doing?

The City of Imperial Beach is engaged in continuous advocacy at every level of government, including requests to fund immediate solutions and petitions to the various responsible agencies. The City of Imperial Beach played an essential role advocating for and securing funding to rehabilitate and expand the International Wastewater Treatment Plant. The City of Imperial Beach has declared a state of emergency and encourages other agencies to do the same. For more details on the City's efforts, visit:

<https://www.imperialbeachca.gov/644/Imperial-Beach-Sewage-Emergency>

Where do I learn more about health concerns in south San Diego?

The County of San Diego Health & Human Services Agency has prepared a website with various links here:

https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/south-region-health-concerns/

Additional Information

- San Diego County Air Pollution Control District: <https://www.sdapcd.org/content/sdapcd/about/tj-river-valley.html>
- Tijuana River Valley Sewage Crisis Environmental Dashboard: https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/south-region-health-concerns/Environmental-Dashboard.html

How do I know if the ocean water is closed?

Timely reports and maps of local water quality are available online and updated regularly by the County of San Diego. Visit the Beach & Bay Water Quality Program link here:

<https://www.sdbeachinfo.com/>

What can you do?

Make your voice heard by contacting the following officials and organizations:

- **Governor of California:** Maurice Lyles, Southern California Regional Director, Office of the Governor, maurice.lyles@gov.ca.gov, (916) 799-9480
- **Regional Water Quality Control Board:** David Gibson, Executive Officer, San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, David.Gibson@waterboards.ca.gov, (619) 521-3005
- **U.S. Congressman Juan Vargas:** Janine Bryant, District Chief of Staff, U.S. House of Representatives, Janine.bryant@mail.house.gov, (619) 422-5963
- **U.S. Senator Alex Padilla:** Angel Marquez, Field Representative, United States Senate, Angel_Marquez@padilla.senate.gov, (619) 239-3884
- **Federal IBWC:** William Charles "Chad" McIntosh, IBWC Commissioner, PAO@ibwc.gov
- **Federal EPA:** Josh F.W. Cook, Regional Administrator, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 9, alexander.joshua@epa.gov
- **County of San Diego Board of Supervisors:** Supervisor Paloma Aguirre-District 1, District1community@sdcounty.ca.gov, (619) 531-5511

If you live within the City of San Diego boundaries, please contact:

- **Mayor of San Diego:** Dion Akers, Regional Government Affairs Manager, DAkers@sandiego.gov, (619) 236-6330
- **City of San Diego:** District 8 Councilmember Vivian Moreno, vivianmoreno@sandiego.gov, (619) 236-6688

Can I stay updated on the development of projects from the International Boundary and Water Commission?

The IBWC is providing weekly public updates on project implementation through a new website: <https://www.ibwc.gov/10-mgd-incremental-increase-100-days/> For general questions, email PAO@ibwc.gov.

How can I complain about the air quality/odors?

Continue reporting the sewage stench and any associated impacts. Your reporting is not complaining, it is documented information that contributes to the data being collected.

1. Report Air Quality/Odor:

You can report air quality concerns to the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD) by phone at (858) 586-2650 or e-mail at apcdcomp@sdapcd.org. For after-hours concerns, please call (858) 586-2650 and select option 2. You can also download mobile apps to report air quality concerns at the following link:

<https://www.sdapcd.org/content/sdapcd/compliance/air-quality-complaints.html>

2. Report your Health Symptoms:

Report health symptoms associated to the Tijuana River Pollution and odors to your physician, health clinician or health center, identifying the risk area you live in and the odor concerns. Strongly urge you to report your symptoms to the SD County Health Department at phone number (619) 515-6555, or send a message at

https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/hhsa_directors_office/contact-us.html

How do I participate in the survey conducted about the health risk and exposure impacts?

San Diego State University

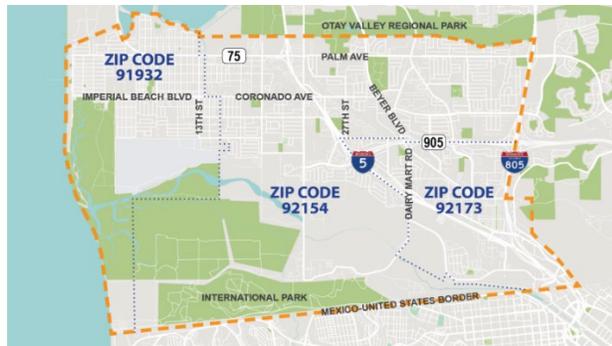
The survey will be open for approximately one year starting in October 2024. This survey is being conducted by SDSU School of Public Health. You are invited to participate in a research study called "Healthy Water, Healthy Air" to understand how pollution in the Tijuana River and Estuary affects the air, water and health of nearby communities. This study is led by Dr. Paula Granados from San Diego State University (SDSU) School of Public Health. Survey link: <https://tjriver.sdsu.edu/>

Which Air filters or Purifiers Should I Obtain?

Air purifiers should include HEPA or MERV-13 filters for smoke and bio particles and activated carbon with potassium permanganate for gases/odors.

As of February 12, 2025, the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD) is distributing a free air purifier and up to two filters through the Air Improvement Relief Effort (AIRE) Program to households in communities affected by the cross-border wastewater odors in the South Bay. The Air Improvement Relief Effort (AIRE) Program is part of SDAPCD's efforts to help those households impacted by the odors from the transboundary wastewater and sewage in the Tijuana River Valley.

The program is open to eligible households within City of San Diego communities of Otay Mesa West, San Ysidro, Egger Highlands, Nestor, and Tijuana River Valley, and the City of Imperial Beach. See qualifying map boundary below:



For additional information about the program, eligibility and requirements, visit sdapcd.org/filters.

Who can I contact in the City of Imperial Beach for more information?

You can reach Tyler Foltz, City Manager, at tfoltz@imperialbeachca.gov, or call (619) 423-0314.