

**Tijuana River Valley Briefing Sheet – 6/23/2025**

As an environmental champion and the state-designated trustee for beach and submerged lands in Imperial Beach, the San Diego Unified Port District (Port) is committed to working cooperatively with its federal, state, regional, and local partners to participate in and support various efforts to address water and air quality in the Tijuana River Valley and nearby coastal waters, as well as health and safety of our local communities. Over the past decade, the Port and other local agencies have forged a strong partnership with federal agencies to develop comprehensive solutions for the ongoing binational pollution crisis. This briefing sheet provides updates on current federal, state, and regional level activities related to the Tijuana River Valley.

Federal Efforts

- The [USIBWC-USEPA June 2023 Joint Record of Decision \(ROD\) for the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement \(USMCA\) Mitigation of Contaminated Transboundary Flows Project](#) identified projects in the US and Mexico to reduce sewage in canyon flows, discharged directly to the Pacific Ocean at San Antonio de los Buenos Creek in Punta Banderas, Mexico, and wastewater in the Tijuana River. The ROD is what enables USEPA and US International Boundary Water Commission (USIBWC) to proceed to the design phase for proposed projects.
- Several of the projects in the ROD are the same as, or similar to, those included in Minute 328, a binational agreement that includes project responsibilities, such as operation and maintenance (O&M) and cost sharing. USIBWC has a publicly accessible [GIS web portal](#) to view the location, description, and status of projects included in Minute 328. Border Infrastructure Repairs and Improvements updates include:
 - The expansion of South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) from 25 to 50 million gallons per day (MGD) is the only U.S.-side project of the Minute 328 projects planned for 2022-2027. USIBWC anticipates design for the SBIWTP rehabilitation and expansion project to be completed by May 2026. The maximum timeline for construction is five years. The contractor expected to shorten this timeline by as much as 18 months through a progressive design-build approach. The plant will remain in operation throughout design and construction. See the official USIBWC X account for the most up-to-date information regarding its operations: <https://x.com/usibwc>
 - ***Acceleration of the Incremental Expansion: On May 20, USIBWC issued a press release announcing a planned acceleration of the incremental expansion of the SBIWTP from 25 to 35 MGD. USIBWC's announcement states that the accelerated incremental expansion is on track to be completed in 100 days. This effort will happen concurrently with USIBWC's progressive design-build approach for the larger SBIWTP***

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expansion effort. USIBWC provided a progress update at their [June 12, 2025 Citizens Forum](#).

- *San Antonio de los Buenos (SAB) wastewater treatment plant:* Eighteen MGD of sewage will be treated by the new SAB treatment plant prior to being discharged directly to the ocean six miles south of the border in Punta Banderas, Mexico. **USIBWC reports operations at the SAB wastewater treatment plant will transition from the Mexican Secretariate of National Defense (SEDENA) to Tijuana's State Public Services Commission (CESPT) in June 2025. La Jornada Baja California has posted a video outlining the details of the San Antonio de los Buenos Wastewater Treatment Plant (subtitles in English):**
<https://youtu.be/oriEa8w9Eqs?si=ulz2GReiogytVzJ4>
- *Tijuana's International Collector:* Both phases of the rehabilitation of the International Collector in Tijuana which Mexico are complete. While the initial plan for Phase 2 involved a three-to-five-day outage at the SBIWTP, authorities in Mexico were able to bring in temporary pumps to continue supplying the SBIWTP with influent during Phase 2. **USIBWC and the operator of the SBIWTP, Veolia, continue to coordinate closely with authorities in Mexico to ensure the plant remains in compliance with its NPDES permit after it resumed operations following Phase 2. However, USIBWC reports that sediment loading at the SBIWTP remains high. USIBWC expects to clean the SBIWTP headworks upon completion of Phase 2 of the rehabilitation of the International Collector.**
- *Junction Box 1 (JB1):* The purpose of Junction Box 1 (JB1), located just north of the international border and upstream of the SBIWTP, is to control influent flow to the SBIWTP. JB1's 72-inch gate valve that connects to Tijuana's sewage collection system and 96-inch gate valve that connects to Junction Box 2 (JB2), which feeds the SBIWTP, are both inoperable. There continues to be no reliable way for USIBWC to control influent flow to the SBIWTP so that it does not exceed its permitted limit of 25 MGD (monthly average). USIBWC previously estimated that a new junction box would be installed by February 10, 2025. However, the schedule has been delayed because of changes in design and long lead times for receiving construction material. USIBWC now estimates that the new JB1 will be installed by August 31, 2025.
- *Ongoing operation and maintenance of the SBIWTP infrastructure* will require long-term federal funding while river diversion, trash boom, and other supplemental projects identified in the Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution remain unfunded. The Port continues to advocate for the additional funding needed to fully implement the Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution, including support for the following legislation.
 - *Water Resources Development Act:* The *Water Resources Development Act* (WRDA) was signed and authorized into law. One of the key priorities of the Act

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- is to allocate \$200 million to help address water infrastructure needs and assist the region's response to sewage pollution in the Tijuana River Valley. Currently, WRDA-related funds have not been appropriated.
- USIBWC's Annual Construction Budget for Maintenance Needs:
 - In 2024, Congress appropriated \$156 million as a part of the 2024 appropriations bill to USIBWC's construction budget for maintenance needs. Of that amount, \$103 million was directed to SBIWTP in the Tijuana River Valley. However, there has been no ongoing funding source appropriated to maintain operations of the SBIWTP.
 - On March 15, 2025, the Full-Year Continuing Appropriations and Extensions Act, 2025 ([H.R. 1968](#)) was signed by President Trump. This Continuing Resolution (CR) provides continuing appropriations to fund the government at the current FY 2024 funding levels through September 30, 2025. The CR included a reduction of the USIBWC's construction budget for FY 2025 from \$156 million to \$78 million.
 - [H.R. 10545](#) included \$250 million in construction funds to the USIBWC. The \$600 million in total investments to date meets USIBWC's funding needs for rehabilitation and expansion of SBIWTP. The total investment amount includes the initial \$300 million approved in July 2020 under the first Trump Administration.
 - [H.R. 1948](#): On March 6, 2025, Representative Scott Peters [introduced legislation](#) to authorize the USIBWC to accept funding from federal and non-federal entities for wastewater treatment, flood control projects, or other water conservation efforts. Currently, the USIBWC is almost solely reliant upon annual appropriations from Congress or emergency funding to build and maintain its facilities. **This bill passed in the House of Representatives on June 9, 2025 and goes to the Senate next for consideration.**
 - *Superfund Designation*: In response to an October 24, 2024, petition from local elected officials, USEPA conducted a preliminary evaluation of the Lower Tijuana River Valley for eligibility to be added to the National Priorities List (NPL) under the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act (CERCLA), also known as Superfund. On January 3, USEPA responded that further evaluation of the Tijuana River Valley as a Superfund site was not warranted, in part, because contaminants detected in water and sediment samples do not exceed USEPA's screening levels for protection of human health. On March 14, 2025, USEPA reaffirmed its decision not to review the Tijuana River Estuary for Superfund designation, citing ongoing wastewater treatment projects and a lack of immediate human health risks.

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State Efforts

- The State of California has been a partner to the region in mitigating issues beyond the federal purview.
- San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board (San Diego Water Board) – [US-Mexico Border Water Quality](#) efforts:
 - ***Status of SBIWTP Compliance:*** Since November 2024, USIBWC's SBIWTP has been in compliance with secondary treatment effluent standards. However, the San Diego Water Board has stated that additional Notice of Violations may be issued to USIBWC if they are unable to attain compliance with the NPDES Permit for alleged violations related to late report submissions, inadequate maintenance, and unauthorized discharges of waste. USIBWC flow gauge data for the Tijuana River is available on the [USIBWC Water Data Portal](#).
 - ***Acceleration of the Incremental Expansion:*** The San Diego Water Board is fast tracking the amendment to the USIBWC's NPDES permit to allow the International Treatment Plant to treat an additional 10 MGD. There will be a 30-day public review and comment period before the amended permit is finalized.
 - ***Presentations:*** David Gibson (Executive Officer, San Diego Water Board) and Gilbert Anaya (Chief, Environmental Management Division, USIBWC) were on the speaker panel for the *Tijuana River Watershed Issues and Solutions* session at the [Industrial Environmental Association \(IEA\) conference](#) on June 5, 2025. The Acceleration of the Incremental Expansion of the SBIWTP was a key topic discussed.
- [SB 867 \(Border Rivers\)](#) and [Proposition 4](#): *SB 867 Safe Drinking Water, Wildfire Prevention, Drought Preparedness, and Clean Air Bond Act of 2024* included \$50 million allocated to address water quality problems in the California-Mexico cross-border rivers and coastal waters, including the Tijuana River Valley Watershed. The Port submitted a letter of support for SB 867 in July 2024. SB 867 was signed into law last year. Proposition 4, which was approved by California voters in November 2024, authorized the state to issue the funds as identified in SB 867. Funding will start in FY 2026.
- [SB 10 Otay Mesa Toll Facility Act](#): SB 10, authored by Senator Steve Padilla, would authorize a portion of the toll revenues from State Route 11 (that will connect Otay Mesa East Border Crossing with the 905 and 125) to be allocated to the maintenance of the USIBWC's SBIWTP and the development of additional sanitation infrastructure projects related to the Tijuana River pursuant to an agreement with the federal government. The Port submitted a letter of support for SB 10, but with emphasis that the revenue should go towards supporting state and regional projects beyond federal

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purview. **SB 10 passed the California Senate on June 3, 2025, and was ordered to the Assembly. As of June 9, 2025, it has been referred to the State Committee on Transportation in the Assembly.**

Regional Efforts

- As part of the regional coalition, the Port has advocated for the USIBWC to comply with secondary treatment effluent standards¹, participated in the development of the USMCA Mitigation of Contaminated Transboundary Flows Project (also known as the Comprehensive Infrastructure Solution), and supported efforts to obtain funding to complete the projects and identify ongoing funding sources to maintain operations of the SBIWTP so that the infrastructure can continue to function as intended for years to come. The Port supported local and state efforts that led to the signing of [H.R. 10545](#), which included \$250 million in construction funds to the USIBWC. The Port is also a member of the Tijuana River Valley Recovery Team Steering Committee, led by the San Diego Water Board
- On April 3, 2024, the Board of Port Commissioners (Board) adopted a proclamation of a local emergency for Tijuana River Valley transboundary pollution crisis in solidarity with our regional partners. Since then, the Board has continued the declaration because of the ongoing presence of transboundary flows and beach closures that are beyond the control of local resources and that require substantial efforts and resources of the federal and state government. The Board will continue the declaration at their June 6, 2025, meeting.
- Water Quality and Beach Closures: The beaches from Border Field State Park to Imperial Beach have been closed continuously for over three years (since December 8, 2021) because of the risk from pathogens in the sewage in the transboundary flows. The water quality impacts come from many sources, including sewage released six miles south of the border in Punta Bandera, aging infrastructure in Tijuana and SBIWTP, and wastewater directly discharging into the Tijuana River. Recent water quality related activities:
 - **Heal the Bay's [2024-2025 Beach Report Card](#): Heal the Bay released a condensed version of their 2024-2025 Beach Report Card on May 22, 2025. The full report will be released in July 2025. Heal the Bay assigns annual "A-to-F" letter grades for 700 beaches from Washington State to Tijuana, Mexico, including 500 California beaches in the 2024-2025 report, based on levels of fecal-indicator bacterial pollution in the ocean**

¹ Order No. R9-2021-0001 as amended by Order No. R9-2023-0009, National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System No. CA0108928, Waste Discharge Requirements for the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant Discharge to the Pacific Ocean Through the South Bay Ocean Outfall (NPDES Permit)

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measured by County health agencies. One beach in Mexico and four south county beaches are listed on their *Top Ten Beach Bummers List* including:

- **#1 Playa Blanca (in Mexico)**
- **#3 Tijuana Slough at Tijuana River Mouth,**
- **#7 Tijuana Slough, North of Tijuana River,**
- **#8 Border Field State Park at Monument Rd., and,**
- **#9 Imperial Beach at Seacoast Dr.**
- Dr. Falk Feddersen and Dr. Sarah Giddings at Scripps Institute of Oceanography are currently developing a Pathogen Forecast Model (PFM) to predict the presence of harmful pathogens in Tijuana River Valley and Imperial Beach coastline. The Scripps researchers previously developed a physical model showing how ocean and estuary currents and contaminated wastewater are transported along the coast.
- Through a \$100K USEPA grant, San Diego State University (SDSU) researchers continue to monitor and assess the percentage of wastewater flowing in the river valley by analyzing for tryptophan and other analytes as surrogates to sewage. This information will be used in the development of a predictive model. [Preliminary results of the Tijuana River Valley Healthy Water, Healthy Air Study are now available.](#)
- **On May 28, the peer-reviewed multidisciplinary scientific journal Science Advances published a study examining the impacts of transboundary pollution in the Tijuana River and near shore waters on coastal aerosols. The study finds that wastewater compounds detected in water samples, become aerosolized and are detectable in both water and air at concentrations between 1 picogram per cubic meter and 1 nanogram per cubic meter. The study showed that “...coastal aerosols near a major pollution source may pose an inhalation risk for illicit and anthropogenic chemicals commonly only considered in water.” The study also demonstrated that assessing airborne exposure to wastewater chemicals needs to be included in assessing health risks for people in Imperial Beach and as far north as La Jolla. The full study is available on Science Advances’ website:**
<https://www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.ads9476>
- Air quality in the Tijuana River Valley has been severely impacted and has been the focus of various agencies and local groups. Concerns have increased about the health risks facing South Bay residents exposed to the aerosolization of sewage and other pollutants, which result in strong odors emanating from the river and increased reports of illnesses as indicated through health data collection efforts.

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- *Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER)*: The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the County of San Diego completed a survey in October 2024 to help public health and emergency response leaders learn more about health concerns and impacts from pollution in the Tijuana River Valley. The CASPER results can be found on the [South Region Health Concerns CDC Health Survey webpage](#).
- *Assessment for Chemical Exposures (ACE)*: The County of San Diego in partnership with the CDC and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) surveyed people online from October 21 through November 22, 2024, to learn more about the health concerns and impacts so public health and emergency response leaders can assess impacts of the pollution, direct public health response, target outreach to prevent similar incidents, assess the need to modify emergency response procedures, and identify a group of exposed people that may be followed for long-term effects. **CDC personnel were back in the Valley the week of June 9th to continue the epidemiology study looking into how extensive the contamination is and how the area residents (school age children in particular) are affected. The CDC will also engage with scientists from the University of California at San Diego and San Diego State University.**
- *“Healthy Water, Healthy Air” Community Survey*: In October 2024, researchers at the SDSU School of Public Health initiated a survey to identify health issues linked to environmental conditions in the Tijuana River region. Visit <https://tjriver.sdsu.edu/> for more information on the status of the survey and additional resources.
- Dr. Kim Prather (Scripps) is conducting research on the aerosolization of bacteria and chemical compounds such as hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) within the Tijuana River Valley due to the transboundary pollution flowing into Tijuana River to help assess how coastal communities are exposed to coastal water pollution even without entering polluted waters. **Dr. Prather was a plenary speaker at the June 5, 2025 IEA conference, where she shared her research findings and efforts to conference attendees from various industries, government agencies, and non-government organizations.**
- The San Diego Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD) is conducting air quality monitoring efforts, including the installation of three H₂S analyzers (at San Ysidro, Berry Elementary, and IB City Hall) which collect concentration data (ppb) used to issue SDAPCD’s air quality advisories and provide the air quality data that is posted to the SDAPCD’s website dashboard. Under a separate effort, six air quality sensors were installed within the river valley to track trends. These six sensors serve primarily as indicators of the presence/absence of H₂S

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- only. The Port collaborated with SDAPCD to install one of the six sensors at the IB Pier plaza. The air quality sensor installed at the Imperial Beach Pier Plaza in August 2024 will be in place for a 2- to 3-year period. Please note, the data from the six sensors are not a feature on the SDAPCD website's dashboard because the sensors do not have the level of accuracy needed for odor advisories and SDAPCD didn't want to create any confusion with the public. However, SDAPCD can provide the data from the IB Pier sensor upon request.
- SDAPCD and the County of San Diego continue their efforts to distribute 10,000 air purifiers to residents in the affected communities through the SDAPCD's [Air Improvement Relief Effort \(A.I.R.E.\) Program](#). About \$2.7 million had been set aside by SDAPCD to purchase 10,000 purifiers and cover district staff time to conduct the program. The California Air Resources Board will reimburse the money. On April 29, 2025, SDAPCD announced that it expects to ship 500 purifiers in the following days, adding to the 2,500 previously distributed. Since the program launched in early February, more than 4,000 applications were received. In March 2025, SDAPCD reported most applications came from households in zip codes 92154 and 91932.
 - [Tijuana River Valley Sewage Crisis Environmental Dashboard](#): The County of San Diego released a dashboard with an interactive map on April 29, 2025, geared to provide information from multiple sources about the air and beach/river water quality in San Diego related to Tijuana River transboundary pollution. The dashboard was created to provide a one-stop shop visual summary for South County residents to be informed about health risks tied to pollution. Information includes beach closures along the coastline, current levels of hydrogen sulfide (H₂S) in the air, locations of recent wastewater spills, and areas where people have complained of odors.