



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

1600 PACIFIC HIGHWAY, ROOM 335, SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA 92101-2470

September 15, 2025

E. Joaquin Esquivel, Chair
State Water Resources Control Board
1001 I Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Subject: Request for Allocation of Proposition 4 Funding for the Tijuana River Valley

Dear Chair Esquivel,

On behalf of the County of San Diego, I write to respectfully request that your board allocate the full amount of Proposition 4 cross-border rivers funding for projects aimed at addressing the ongoing environmental and public health crises in the Tijuana River Valley.

The Tijuana River sewage crisis has had profound environmental, public health, and economic impacts across multiple communities in South San Diego County, with over 100 billion gallons of sewage crossing the international border into our region through the Tijuana River since 2018. This untreated sewage, along with other pollutants in the Tijuana River, flows into our beach water, resulting in the closure of some beaches in our region for more than 1,300 consecutive days due to poor water quality, impacting our region's tourism-dependent economy and our country's military preparedness. Furthermore, the pollution crisis has also affected the region's air quality. Increased levels of hydrogen sulfide gas, and many more toxic gases, are also present and impact the health of residents who live in the South Bay, causing many to report chronic symptoms such as headache and nausea resulting from the toxic gases.

A recent study conducted by the CDC entitled the Assessment of Chemical Exposure (ACE) included 2,100 community members. The findings were alarming with 97% of survey respondents expressing concern about air quality and 96% concerned about beach water quality. 92% of respondents reported they do not feel safe in the areas where they live, work, or visit. 64% of respondents reported new or worsening physical symptoms they attributed to the sewage crisis in the past 30 days with the most common being headache, runny nose, congestion, and respiratory symptoms such as coughing and difficulty breathing. All of these symptoms are consistent with symptoms related to hydrogen sulfide exposure which is a toxic gas that pollutes the air from a "hot spot" in Southern San Diego. 28% of participants reported symptoms of anxiety and 21% reported symptoms of depression. Notably, the rates of mental health symptoms were higher among those reporting severe sewage smell and a staggering 65% of participants felt their mental health symptoms were related to the sewage crisis.

Proposition 4, a statewide bond measure authorizing the State to borrow \$10 billion for clean water efforts, fire prevention, stormwater management, and climate resilience, was passed by the voters during the November 2024 General Election, garnering approximately 60% of the vote. Following our County's proactive engagement with the State Legislature, Proposition 4 included dedicated funding, up to \$50 million, to be available to the State Water Resources Control Board for projects in the Tijuana River Valley and New River watersheds that would "address water quality problems arising in the California-Mexico cross-border rivers and coastal waters." Given the scope of this crisis and the significant impacts our residents feel and breathe every day, we believe all \$50 million should be allocated to fund critical projects in the Tijuana River Valley.

Proposition 4 presents a unique opportunity for the County and region to secure dedicated State funding for projects, such as a solution to the Saturn Boulevard Hot Spot, that would help safeguard the health of the environment and the individuals and families who live and work in the South Bay. With this intent in mind, our Board of Supervisors adopted a resolution on September 9, 2025, requesting that the State Water Resources Control Board allocate the full \$50 million of Proposition 4 cross-border rivers funding to projects in the Tijuana River Valley.

While the County of San Diego continues to actively collaborate with regional partners, other stakeholders, and with the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board to identify and elevate priority projects to fund through Proposition 4, we respectfully request that your Board allocate the full amount of Proposition 4 cross-border rivers funding to projects in the Tijuana River Valley. This critical investment will help us tackle the most pressing issues in our community that result from harmful pollution in the Tijuana River Valley, and will equip stakeholders across our region with the tools they need to end this crisis once and for all.

In an effort to highlight the urgency of this crisis, please find attached several articles and studies that demonstrate the impact this crisis has had on the environment, individuals and families, and on public health.

Should you have any questions, please contact Matthew Parr, Director of the Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs, at matthew.parr@sdcounty.ca.gov or (619) 372-2126. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



TERRA LAWSON-REMER
Chair, San Diego County Board of Supervisors
Supervisor, Third District



PALOMA AGUIRRE
Chair Pro Tem, County Board of Supervisors
Supervisor, First District

CC: Members of the State Water Resources Control Board

Enclosures:

- A Resolution of the Board of Supervisors of the County of San Diego Relating to Advocacy for State Funding Allocations to Address the Tijuana River Valley Pollution Crisis
- Results of the Assessment of Chemical Exposures (ACE) survey
- Results of the Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER) survey
- Findings of the County of San Diego's 2023 study on the Economic Impacts of Transboundary Pollution
- *Heavily polluted Tijuana River drives regional air quality crisis* by Prather, Granados, et al.
- *Tijuana River Contamination from Urban Runoff and Sewage: A Public Health Crisis at the Border* by Granados, Sant, et al.
- *Health Impacts in Residents Exposed to Tijuana River Pollution A Community-Based Assessment of Environmental and Public Health Risks in the U.S.-Mexico Border Region* by Granados et al.
- *Low level exposure to hydrogen sulfide: a review of emissions, community exposure, health effects, and exposure guidelines* by Batterman et al.