

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
TUESDAY, JANUARY 28, 2025**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 21

**SUBJECT: CONVENING A TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY POLLUTION SPECIAL MEETING
(DISTRICTS: ALL)**

OVERVIEW

For decades, the Tijuana River valley pollution crisis has plagued the binational region of San Diego and Baja California, as rapid population growth and inadequate wastewater infrastructure have allowed untreated sewage and industrial runoff to flow across the border and into communities. This crisis is not just a South Bay issue but impacts communities across the entire San Diego region, jeopardizing access to clean water and clean air, while polluting our beaches and coastlines.

The County of San Diego has led on this issue, declaring a local state of emergency since June 2023, and taking aggressive action, including spearheading air quality and public health efforts with our regional, state, and federal partners, providing air purifiers for impacted residents, and working to address trash capture and flood risk in the river valley.

Thanks to the relentless efforts of local and congressional leaders, unprecedented progress has been made. In December 2024, the San Diego Congressional Delegation secured the final \$250 million in federal funding needed to complete the \$650 million repair and expansion of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant, eventually doubling its capacity to treat 50 million gallons per day. This historic appropriation is the biggest investment in nearly three decades and a major step in the right direction, but the fight is still far from over.

While these investments mark a historic milestone, the challenges remain urgent. Persistent air quality issues, ongoing contamination, and ecological degradation continue to pose significant threats to the river valley, estuary, and coastal communities. Despite the progress made, these critical issues demand sustained and immediate action.

Now more than ever, we need coordinated efforts across local, state, federal, and international levels and a shared understanding of how agencies on both sides of the border are tackling different aspects of the problem. As the issue grows in regional significance, it is imperative that the County convene a special meeting to explore the problem in greater depth, highlight progress and solutions that are underway, and collaborate to generate new opportunities for action.

Our communities have long demanded transparency and accountability on efforts to resolve the Tijuana River pollution. The public deserves a clear and comprehensive understanding of the significant progress underway, the gaps that still need to be addressed, and the opportunities for further action. This convening can serve as a platform for fostering collaboration among a diverse range of stakeholders-community members, local and binational leaders, technical experts, and relevant agencies-while identifying innovative solutions to bridge these gaps and drive meaningful, lasting change.

On January 8, 2025, the County Board received a presentation from staff that identified programs and additional opportunities for state and federal partnership to address the Tijuana River valley pollution conditions that could be explored. The Board discussed the need to continue taking urgent action to stop the sewage, open our beaches, and address the health threats to our communities.

Today's item directs the County to coordinate a special meeting in Spring 2025. The special meeting would be structured as panels that cover different dimensions of the issue to highlight the interconnected nature of this work. These dimensions may include U.S. sewage and water infrastructure, Mexican sewage and water infrastructure, immediate health impacts, and long-term environmental remediation. Invited representatives from partner agencies would share presentations on their work, highlight progress being made, and answer questions.

By convening a special meeting with key stakeholders and agencies, the County can ensure progress is effectively communicated, on-going gaps are identified, and new opportunities for collaborative action can emerge to protect the health and welfare of our communities.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

VICE-CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER

Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to coordinate a Tijuana River Valley Pollution special meeting in the Spring of 2025 with invited representatives from partnering agencies sharing presentations on their work, highlighting progress being made, and discussing gaps and opportunities for further action. County staff should provide a synopsis of meeting outcomes, including a summary of progress being made, identified gaps and challenges, and opportunities for continued collaborative action.

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Tijuana River pollution and contamination have disproportionately impacted communities that have been underserved and under-resourced, such as low-income communities and communities of color. It is imperative that the County take action to ensure that these individuals have solutions to improve and protect their local waterways, the surrounding land, and their air quality.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

This board letter aligns with the County's sustainability goals by protecting the environment and fighting to eliminate hazardous substances, chemicals, and waste from our water sources and water bodies in San Diego.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funding for the requested action is included in the Fiscal Year 2024-25 Operational Plan based on existing staff time in the Department of Environmental Health and Quality, the Department of Public Works, the Department of Parks and Recreation, the Office of Economic Development and Government Affairs, the Office of County Counsel, and the Department of Public Health Services funded by General Purpose Revenue and other funding sources. There will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The long-term impacts of the transboundary pollutants in the Tijuana River Valley area, subsequent beach closures and air quality issues have had a devastating impact on the surrounding communities up and down San Diego County's coast and near the border through decreased visitors and street traffic. It is imperative that the County convene stakeholders who are leading efforts toward infrastructure fixes needed to mitigate this binational issue.

ACTION:

Noting for the record that this item was discussed at the January 29, 2025 session; ON MOTION of Supervisor Lawson-Remer, seconded by Supervisor Desmond, the Board of Supervisors directed the Chief Administrative Officer to coordinate a Tijuana River Valley Pollution special meeting in the Spring of 2025 with invited representatives from partnering agencies sharing presentations on their work, highlighting progress being made, and discussing gaps and opportunities for further action. County staff should provide a synopsis of meeting outcomes, including a summary of progress being made, identified gaps and challenges, and opportunities for continued collaborative action. County staff are also directed to engage State and Federal Elected Officials from the beginning as co leads for the meeting and include them on invitations that go out.

AYES: Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe, Desmond

ABSENT: (District 1 Seat Vacant)

State of California)
County of San Diego) §

I hereby certify that the foregoing is a full, true and correct copy of the Original entered in the Minutes of the Board of Supervisors.

ANDREW POTTER
Clerk of the Board of Supervisors



Signed
by Andrew Potter