

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2024**

**MINUTE ORDER NO. 28**

**SUBJECT: RECEIVE UPDATE ON EXPANDING MOBILIZATION AGAINST THE  
TIJUANA RIVER SEWAGE CRISIS (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

Over the years, San Diego County has been negatively impacted due to contamination and pollution from the Tijuana River Valley. Untreated sewage, industrial waste, and urban runoff have contaminated beaches and coastlines. These issues have particular impact on the well-being of residents, the environment, and the economy of the cities and unincorporated communities of Imperial Beach, Chula Vista, National City, San Diego, Bonita, and East Otay Mesa (South Region).

Under the leadership of the San Diego County Board of Supervisors (Board), the County of San Diego (County), in partnership with impacted stakeholders across the region, have responded to this issue through various strategies. Recognizing the detrimental impacts to the environment, economy, and property within San Diego County caused by persistent contamination from cross-border sewage pollution and sewage-impacted ocean waters, the Board issued a Proclamation of Emergency on June 27, 2023 (16). Subsequently, the Board found that there is a continuing need for the local emergency and took action to keep the local emergency in effect, with the most recent action on September 11, 2024 (3).

In May 2024, the Tijuana River Pollution Task Force (Task Force) led by the City of Imperial Beach, San Diego State University School of Public Health, University of California San Diego, and local physicians and community members formed to understand the long-term public health impact and call on local, State, and federal agencies to step up efforts to fix this issue. On June 25, 2024 (11), the Board took action to expand the mobilization against the Tijuana River sewage crisis and directed the Chief Administrative Officer to ensure appropriate County staff begin meeting with the Task Force within 45 days to discuss and develop options and recommendations on coordinated strategies for mobilization and to return to the Board within 90 days with updates on activities related to these strategies. Today's action requests the Board receive the update on efforts related to expanding mobilization against the Tijuana River Valley Sewage Crisis. In addition, prior to the directed progress update scheduled for September, additional response in the Tijuana River Valley was needed to address concerns regarding air quality raised by members of the Task Force. Today's item also details that response and ongoing work, as well as additional actions recommended to be implemented by the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District. This information is categorized under four areas: Prevention; Surveillance; Investigation and Response; as well as Coordination, Collaboration, and Communication.

Today's action supports the County vision of a just, sustainable, and resilient future for all, specifically those communities and populations in San Diego County that have been historically left behind, as well as our ongoing commitment to the regional *Live Well San Diego* vision of healthy, safe and thriving communities.

## **RECOMMENDATION(S)**

### **CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER**

Receive the update on Task Force Options and Recommendations relating to expanding mobilization against the Tijuana River sewage crisis.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Communities in the South Region are most impacted by the Tijuana River transboundary pollution, including untreated sewage, sediment, and trash. These communities are in a highly diverse border region with 62.1% of the population identifying by race/ethnicity as Hispanic based on United States Census Bureau data. In 2022, the non-Hispanic or Latino populations of the area identified as 17.2% White, 12.6% Asian, 4.5% Black, and the remainder identified as other race/ethnicity. The area has a large proportion of economically disadvantaged residents with existing racial inequities. On average between 2021 and 2022, some areas in the South Region had some of the highest proportions of adults with income less than 200% Federal Poverty Line compared to all other HHSA Regions in San Diego County.

South Region beach waters have been severely impacted by untreated sewage, which has required the County Department of Environmental Health and Quality (DEHQ) to issue beach water contact closures at numerous beaches. As such, the most southern beach in Imperial Beach was closed for over 1,000 consecutive days. According to International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), over 100 billion gallons of sewage has impacted the Tijuana River Valley since 2018. South Region residents have registered concerns about the impacts of the environment and foul smells from the Tijuana River pollution on their communities and well-being, as well as on the quality of life of residents, visitors, and people working in the area. These concerns have also been elevated through various community outreach events, media, and elected community representatives.

The County provides regular public updates including water quality and health data to keep the community informed of the impacts of the Tijuana River transboundary pollution. Educational materials have been developed and are available to the public on a dedicated County webpage which also contains links to other informational resources. In addition, the County fosters open communication with the community through various channels including County news stories and press releases. The County has contributed to a community survey, which is under development by the Task Force. The County is also working in collaboration with the California Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) to ensure comprehensive disease investigation efforts. A collaborative effort between the County, the Task Force, and community, State, and federal partners is essential to addressing the root causes of environmental disparities that impact the South Region.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Today's proposed action supports the County of San Diego Sustainability Goal #4 to protect the health and well-being of everyone in the region; Sustainability Goal #5 to protect water in all forms; Sustainability Goal #6 to develop natural and organic land management policies that protect ecosystems, habitats, biodiversity, and soil health throughout the county while providing opportunities for all residents to access and enjoy the outdoors; and Sustainability Goal #7 to reduce pollution and waste and demonstrate reduction in consumption of resources. This will be accomplished by collaborating with community partners and advocating for environmental justice for communities that

have been disproportionately impacted by the Tijuana River Valley sewage crisis. These efforts aim to protect the environment and promote natural resources and diverse habitats, and cultivate a natural environment for residents, visitors, and future generations to enjoy in San Diego County.

#### **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact with today's recommendation to receive the update on the Task Force options and recommendations. There may be future impacts associated with the implementation of Task Force recommendations for which staff will return to the Board with recommendations for consideration and approval. At this time, there will be no change in net General Fund cost and no additional staff years.

#### **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

The impact of beach closures has had a devastating impact on coastal communities through decreased visitors and street traffic. A reduction in individuals moving into affected coastal communities may affect real estate and properties.

#### **ACTION:**

ON MOTION of Supervisor Vargas, seconded by Supervisor Lawson-Remer, the Board of Supervisors took action as recommended.

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

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