



County of San Diego

Board of Supervisors

August 4, 2025

President Donald J. Trump
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Re: County of San Diego's request for Federal Emergency Declaration for San Diego County and the Tijuana River Valley

Dear President Trump:

On behalf of the County of San Diego (County) Board of Supervisors (Board), we write to urgently request a Federal Emergency Declaration for San Diego County regarding the ongoing transboundary pollution and sewage crisis in the Tijuana River Valley. The Board recently renewed its proclamation of the existence of a county-wide local emergency due to this crisis; the 17th time in a row that the Board has renewed the local emergency proclamation. This crisis has profound impacts across multiple shorelines and surrounding communities in our region, especially the communities of Imperial Beach, San Ysidro, southern San Diego, and Coronado, which are geographically adjacent or near the international border and Tijuana River Valley. The County appreciates the Administration's commitment to resolving this pollution crisis by investing in needed infrastructure, but more work remains to repair impacted communities and support residents in the South Bay.

San Diego County is home to some of the most beautiful coastline and beaches in the United States, which remain a central economic engine to our county and its residents. However, for decades now, our beaches and coastal waters have been and continue to be polluted due to sewage runoff from the Tijuana River and the failure of infrastructure from wastewater treatment plants across the border. The U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) has documented 89 billion gallons of toxic effluent entering the U.S. through the Tijuana River since December 2022. As a result, some of our beaches have been closed for over **1,300 consecutive days** due to the unsafe levels of pollutants in the water. These closures not only impact the enjoyment of San Diego's beaches for our residents but also have downstream economic impacts for tourism and local businesses that cater to locals and tourists alike.

Furthermore, the recent Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER) and Assessment of Chemical Exposure (ACE) studies document the health effects and public safety concern of those who live and work in the Tijuana River

Valley region. These studies, as well as numerous academic papers on the crisis, are attached for your reference.

The CDC and County conducted the CASPER survey from October 17 to 19, 2024, to help public health and emergency response leaders understand health concerns and impacts stemming from the Tijuana River sewage crisis. Approximately 190 in-person surveys were completed across South County to proportionally represent nearly 41,000 households in the region, with the results providing early insight into the severity of the crisis. Roughly 90 percent of households reported that they were concerned about the sewage crisis, while nearly 60 percent made changes to their usual activities or routines because of the sewage. 45 percent of respondents reported at least one health symptom (e.g. headaches, nausea, cough, gastrointestinal issues) linked to the sewage, with over 80 percent of households reporting concerns about the health of a household member and 18 percent of all respondents seeking medical care. Nearly 90 percent of those surveyed believe the crisis is getting worse.

The ACE study, conducted by the CDC's Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) between October 21 and November 22, 2024, created another opportunity for people affected by the Tijuana River Valley crisis to share their experiences and help public health officials understand complex needs in the region. Nearly 2,100 people completed the ACE survey, most of whom live in affected areas, with 97 percent of respondents reporting concerns about air quality and 96 percent reporting concerns about beach water quality. When asked whether the affected area they live in, work in, or visit is safe, 92 percent responded "no," while 93 percent of respondents reported that sewage cleanup in the area is insufficient. Of note, many respondents reported a distrust of public drinking water sources and a range of physical and mental health symptoms that they believe are linked to the sewage crisis.

In 2023, the County conducted an economic impact survey to assess the economic impacts the transboundary pollution crisis has had on local businesses. The survey indicated that 74 percent of business respondents had been, and continued to be, negatively impacted by the transboundary pollution and 66 percent of respondents reported a decrease in revenue due to the pollution and recent water contact closures. Approximately 47 percent of respondents indicated they had lost at least \$100,000 in business revenue due to the pollution crisis. Furthermore, a majority of businesses reported a decline in customer "foot traffic" due to the beach closures, and nearly 30 percent of respondents had been forced to lay off employees. The impacts on the health of south bay residents and business have been significant.

In 2021, the Board unanimously declared pollution at the Tijuana River Valley a public health crisis. Through this declaration, the County acknowledges that the diverse sources of contamination have a direct correlation to health outcomes in surrounding communities, posing a health and environmental threat. The polluted waters also significantly impact San Diego County's numerous military installations, inhibiting U.S. military readiness.

On June 27, 2023, the Board unanimously proclaimed the existence of a county-wide local emergency due to the transboundary pollution and sewage issues affecting the region. Since then, the County has renewed this local emergency declaration every 60 days, most recently, for the 17th time, on July 22nd. Through this proclamation, the County acknowledges the detrimental impacts to the region caused by the persistent

cross-border sewage and pollution in the Tijuana River Valley and throughout ocean waters of the South County coastlines and the urgent need for a similar declaration at the federal and state level.

The County is encouraged by the funding secured by our Congressional delegation needed to repair the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant as well as the recent Memorandum of Understanding signed by EPA Administrator Zeldin and the Mexican Secretary of the Environment and Natural Resources, Alicia Bárcena Ibarra, to expedite vital construction projects on both sides of the border. However, impacted communities that are suffering the harms from this toxic pollution need immediate medical interventions and resources to mitigate exposure and can't wait years for these infrastructure improvements. Furthermore, additional funding is needed to address the ongoing economic impacts to the region. Just as resources are mobilized in the event of natural disasters, a Federal Emergency Declaration for Tijuana River transboundary pollution would enable unprecedented action at all levels of government and much-needed coordination along with the allocation of critical resources to once and for all end the ongoing sewage crisis.

For the above reasons, we urgently request a Federal Declaration of Emergency for San Diego County.

Sincerely,



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



PALOMA AGUIRRE
Chair Pro Tem, San Diego County
Supervisor, First District

CC: U.S. Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum; Environmental Protection Agency Director Lee Zeldin; Small Business Administrator Kelly Loeffler; Members of the San Diego County Federal Delegation

Enclosures