

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
TUESDAY, JUNE 24, 2025**

**MINUTE ORDER NO. 10**

**SUBJECT:           ADVANCING REGIONAL ACTIONS TO ADDRESS THE TIJUANA RIVER  
SEWAGE AND WAIVE BOARD POLICY A-72 (DISTRICTS: ALL)**

**OVERVIEW**

This year's budget reflects the harsh fiscal reality facing cities and counties across California. County staff have worked to deliver a balanced budget despite inflation, economic pressures, and continued federal instability. But while the budget meets our legal obligation, it does not meet every community need, particularly for families living on the frontlines of environmental pollution.

Nowhere is that gap more visible than in the Tijuana River Valley and our coastal communities, where residents continue to face the fallout of recurring sewage spills, toxic air, and industrial waste. Our Congressional delegation secured \$650 million to upgrade the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant, a major step forward. But construction will take years, and the project addresses only part of the broader contamination problem. In the meantime, millions of gallons of polluted runoff continue to flood into our region, and our residents are left to shoulder the consequences.

Alongside water contamination, dangerous levels of hydrogen sulfide continue to pose a serious public health risk for residents in the Tijuana River Valley and surrounding communities. This toxic gas, released from decaying sewage and industrial waste, has been linked to headaches, respiratory irritation, and long-term health concerns. Families have reported nausea and fatigue, schools have raised alarms, and frontline neighborhoods continue to bear the brunt.

In response, the County and the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District are purchasing 10,000 air purifiers to help reduce indoor exposure—but this is a temporary stopgap, not a systemic fix. Without deeper investments in monitoring, mitigation, and long-term health protections, the crisis will only escalate. This is not an infrastructure nuisance; it is a growing public health emergency that demands urgent, coordinated action.

This year's budget required tough choices. Without new revenues or changes to County reserve policy, not every urgent need could be addressed. As a result, some critical investments were left unfunded, especially those responding to long-standing environmental harms. While public testimony at the June 2025 Budget Hearings reflected a wide range of community needs, the crisis in the Tijuana River Valley remains especially urgent. Local governments must continue to step up.

In partnership with Imperial Beach Mayor Paloma Aguirre, this action supports key elements of her County Sewage Action Plan — including targeted stormwater upgrades to eliminate toxic hot spots, enhanced school air filtration, a hydrogen sulfide health study, and strengthened regional coordination. These community-driven priorities reflect what South County families are experiencing every day.

The proposed program options areas include:

**Matching Funds to Protect Kids from Toxic Air at School:**

Create a County matching fund to support air filtration and HVAC upgrades in schools and childcare centers impacted by Tijuana River pollution, leveraging contributions from school districts, APCD, state and federal grants, philanthropy, and others.

**Launching an Epidemiological Public Health Impact Study:**

Initiate a multi-year health impact study on chronic hydrogen sulfide exposure by convening County public health staff, academic researchers, and philanthropic partners to generate the region's first longitudinal dataset on exposure and health outcomes.

**Infrastructure Matching Funds to Eliminate Toxic Hot Spots:**

Establishing a County matching fund to remediate toxic hot spots along the Tijuana River — starting with hydrogen sulfide releases at Saturn Boulevard — through stormwater infrastructure upgrades that reduce surface disturbance and protect public health.

**Economic Impact Study:**

Commission a comprehensive economic impact analysis of the sewage crisis — expanding beyond the County's prior survey on small business impacts limited to Imperial Beach — to quantify losses to tourism, business, and property values and strengthen advocacy for state and federal investment.

**Designating a County Sewage Crisis Chief:**

Designate a dedicated County lead to coordinate emergency response efforts, secure funding, align agency actions, and keep impacted communities informed and engaged.

These proposals are practical responses to ongoing community impacts and reflect the urgency of addressing long-standing local health and infrastructure failures. In moments of fiscal pressure, it is especially important that we remain clear on our values and ensure public health, environmental safety, and accountability are uplifted.

This item does not propose new spending today but directs the Chief Administrative Officer to evaluate the programmatic options, recommend the most impactful and feasible next steps, and develop a funding and implementation strategy for those selected.

**RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**VICE-CHAIR TERRA LAWSON-REMER**

1. Direct the Chief Administrative Officer to evaluate the programmatic options below and develop strategic recommendations identifying which initiatives the County may prioritize for implementation—focusing on opportunities aligned with core County functions, that offer the greatest public health impact, and that can be leveraged to attract outside funding. Based on that prioritization, develop an implementation roadmap for the selected programs, including potential funding strategies, which should include, but not limited to unassigned fund balances made available by a revised reserve policy, mid-year quarterly budget adjustments through operating results, state and federal grants, philanthropic partnerships, intergovernmental cost-sharing, and other potential revenue options.

The programs are as follows:

- a. **Matching Funds to Protect Kids from Toxic Air at School:** including air filtration and HVAC upgrades in schools and childcare centers impacted by cross-border pollution, leveraging contributions from school districts, the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District, state and federal grants, and philanthropic partners;
- b. **Launching an epidemiological public health impact study** on chronic hydrogen sulfide exposure by convening County public health staff, state and federal agencies, academic researchers, and philanthropic funders to assess long-term health outcomes among impacted residents;
- c. **Infrastructure Matching Funds to Eliminate Toxic Hot Spots** to remediate infrastructure and toxic hot spots along the Tijuana River — such as upgrades at Saturn Boulevard to mitigate aerosolization.
- d. **Economic Impact Study** to assess the full scope of losses caused by the sewage crisis — including impacts to small businesses, property values, and regional tourism — to strengthen future funding and mitigation efforts;
- e. **Designating a County Sewage Crisis Chief** to coordinate emergency response efforts, secure and align infrastructure funding, engage with partner agencies, and keep affected communities informed and supported. The position should be structured and organized in a manner that ensures focused leadership while making efficient use of existing County resources.

Return to the Board on September 30, 2025, with strategic recommendations for Board consideration.

2. Establish an ad hoc subcommittee of this Board, entitled the Ad Hoc Subcommittee on the Tijuana River Sewage Crisis, and appoint Supervisors representing the most impacted coastal communities, District 1 and District 3. The subcommittee will provide focused oversight of mitigation efforts, explore new opportunities and partnerships, coordinate interagency and binational collaboration, and develop actionable recommendations for further Board action. It shall also guide the integration of health and environmental monitoring data, support public engagement efforts, identify aligned funding opportunities, and ensure readiness for emergency response needs as they arise.
3. Waive Board Policy A-72 Agenda and Related Process, Section 2.C.2.ii, which establishes required timelines for review when preparing a Board Letter.

## **EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

Residents living near the Tijuana River have faced ongoing exposure to unsafe air and environmental hazards. This item prioritizes practical investments, like school air filtration and health impact studies, that respond to clear, place-based risks affecting working families and children. By focusing resources where the health consequences are most acute, the County is taking a fair and measured approach to ensure all communities have access to basic public safety and clean environments, regardless of geography.

## **SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT**

This item supports long-term regional stability by addressing preventable public health threats and infrastructure gaps that, if ignored, will become more costly and disruptive over time. Improving indoor air quality in schools, gathering reliable health data, and coordinating regional response efforts all contribute to a more proactive, cost-effective approach to managing environmental risks. Identifying funding now allows the County to strengthen its ability to respond to future challenges without placing additional strain on core services or emergency systems.

## **FISCAL IMPACT**

There is no fiscal impact associated with this action at this time. This item directs staff to explore potential funding sources; any future fiscal impacts will depend on the specific funding options identified. This action does not result in a change to the net General Fund cost and does not require any additional staff years.

## **BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT**

The persistent impacts of the Tijuana River sewage crisis have disrupted local commerce, deterred tourism, and placed an ongoing burden on small businesses operating in coastal and border-adjacent communities. By identifying funding to improve conditions in affected areas, this item supports efforts to restore public confidence, reduce business disruption, and strengthen the long-term economic stability of communities that have faced repeated environmental setbacks beyond their control.

## **ACTION:**

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

AYES: Anderson, Lawson-Remer, Montgomery Steppe

NOES: 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

