

**COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO
BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
TUESDAY, JUNE 03, 2025**

MINUTE ORDER NO. 18

SUBJECT: ADOPTION OF RESOLUTION SUPPORTING STRONGER FEDERAL AND STATE MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ONGOING HEALTH AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CROSS-BORDER POLLUTION IN THE TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

For decades, residents of South County have borne the brunt of the Tijuana River cross-border pollution crisis. They've endured toxic odors, chronic fatigue, nausea, infections, and respiratory illnesses. The ocean waters have become dangerously polluted, forcing repeated beach closures-most notably in Imperial Beach, where beaches have now been closed for well over 1,000 days. Nearby communities like Coronado have also been negatively affected. This ongoing crisis harms public health, disrupts daily life, and hurts local economies. Until recently, the issue received little attention at the federal level or in national media. That's beginning to change, with the new federal administration signaling a more serious approach, as shown by EPA Director Lee Zeldin's recent visit to the region within his first 100 days in office.

At the root of the crisis is Mexico's long-standing failure to invest in adequate sewage treatment infrastructure. As a result, hundreds of billions of gallons of raw sewage, industrial waste, and urban runoff have flowed into the Tijuana River and Pacific Ocean. While the U.S. built the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant to help address this problem, the facility was designed to handle only 25 million gallons a day. When it's overloaded or offline, untreated sewage spills directly into the river and into San Diego. Worse still, the plant doesn't treat the pollution entering through the Tijuana River itself or the sewage being dumped offshore along the western Tijuana coastline. The only lasting solution is for Mexico to build, expand, and maintain modern sewage treatment systems across the city of Tijuana.

On April 16, 2025, a majority of the Imperial Beach City Council passed Resolution No. 2025-020, strengthening their position on the continuing cross-border pollution flowing from the Tijuana River. The resolution supports a range of actions at the local, state, federal, and international levels. The County of San Diego needs to stand with the City of Imperial Beach and demand action from the federal government to hold Mexico accountable.

The County of San Diego must adopt a similar resolution making its position clear: this crisis must be resolved now. We must demand stronger federal action and new legislation that holds Mexico accountable for its environmental obligations. With the momentum of the new federal administration, now is the time to act. Now is the time for bold, coordinated action. I urge the County of San Diego to adopt the resolution in today's item demanding immediate federal intervention and long-term solutions to end the Tijuana River pollution crisis.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

SUPERVISOR JIM DESMOND

Adopt a Resolution entitled: DECLARING SUPPORT FOR ENHANCED FEDERAL AND STATE ACTIONS TO MITIGATE THE ONGOING HEALTH AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS FROM THE CROSS-BORDER POLLUTION CRISIS IN THE TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY (Attachment A).

EQUITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Tijuana River pollution crisis disproportionately affects underserved communities in South County. For instance, residents in these areas might lack access to alternative recreational spaces, particularly outdoors, making them more vulnerable to the health effects of chronic sewage exposure-such as respiratory illness, infections and gastrointestinal disease. Addressing this pollution is critical to promoting public health in South County communities, ensuring fair access to clean air, water, and coastlines.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPACT STATEMENT

The Tijuana River pollution crisis severely undermines regional sustainability goals by degrading coastal ecosystems, contaminating marine habitats and threatening biodiversity. Frequent sewage discharges introduce pathogens, toxic chemicals and solid waste into sensitive natural areas, disrupting the health of wetlands, killing wildlife, and reducing ecosystem services like natural water filtration and carbon sequestration. Without urgent intervention, the ongoing contamination jeopardizes long-term environmental resilience strategies vital for managing flood risk, sea-level rise and habitat restoration.

FISCAL IMPACT

There is no fiscal impact associated with this item. There will be no change in net General Fund costs and no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

The Tijuana River Pollution crisis continues to harm local businesses. Frequent and extended beach closures deter tourism and damage the hospitality and recreation industries. Property values near affected areas have declined or are at risk of declining, discouraging real estate investment. Businesses also face higher health risks for employees, particularly outdoor workers, leading to lost productivity and potential legal liabilities. Recreation-based enterprises, like surf schools and tour operators suffer when water conditions are unsafe.

ACTION 18.1:

A motion was made by Supervisor Desmond, seconded by Supervisor Anderson, for the Board of Supervisors to adopt a revised Resolution entitled: A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO SUPPORTING STRONGER FEDERAL AND STATE MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ONGOING HEALTH AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CROSS-BORDER POLLUTION IN THE TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY, striking the following sentence from section 5: “We strongly oppose the construction of a 50 MGD desalination plant in Playas de Rosarito as part of Mexico’s National Water Plan unless Mexico specifically agrees to implement the existing recycled water projects already identified in IBWC Treaty Minute 328.”

(A substitute motion was introduced.)

ACTION 18.2:

ON MOTION of Supervisor Lawson-Remer, seconded by Supervisor Montgomery Steppe, the Board of Supervisors adopted revised Resolution No. 25-040, entitled: A RESOLUTION OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO SUPPORTING STRONGER FEDERAL AND STATE MEASURES TO ADDRESS THE ONGOING HEALTH AND ECONOMIC IMPACTS OF CROSS-BORDER POLLUTION IN THE TIJUANA RIVER VALLEY, striking the following sections:

5. We strongly oppose the construction of a 50 MGD desalination plant in Playas de Rosarito as part of Mexico's National Water Plan unless Mexico specifically agrees to implement the existing recycled water projects already identified in IBWC Treaty Minute 328. Furthermore, Mexico needs to demonstrate they have the capacity and funding to provide wastewater treatment for any new potable water deliveries into the region.
7. Utilization of diplomatic pressure, economic sanctions, tariffs, limitation of border crossing activity, and international legal action should be considered anytime Mexico is in violation of agreed treaties and Minute orders to leverage Mexico to stop the flow of raw sewage into the United States and its offshore waters.
8. Until such time that Federal legislation can be passed and fully implemented, we request President Donald J. Trump consider initiating an Executive Order requiring such near-term actions with enforcement, as necessary, by all Federal entities and departments, including but not limited to the: Department of State, EPA, and the Department of the Navy.

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