

It is critical that the pollution in the Tijuana River remains the highest priority for the San Diego RWQCB and that this board is taking all necessary steps to proactively address the pollution crisis in the river valley. Today's update from IBWC Commissioner Giner represents an important procedural step to ensure the proposed repairs at the IBWC treatment plant occur as quickly as possible. We hope and expect the San Diego RWQCB to continue using all available tools and regulatory powers to resolve the numerous pollution issues persisting at the plant and occurring within the river valley. We are very concerned that the San Diego RWQCB is not able to stay ahead of the ongoing and severe pollution issues that are that are now documented having major public health impacts within the surrounding communities¹.

Of particular concern is the ongoing discharge of untreated wastewater in Smugglers Canyon, occurring from a breach in the City of San Diego pilot channel. Since the breach emerged after the January 22nd storm, sewage flow from Smugglers has been directed westward, leading to extensive sewage ponding over a large area due to the valley's flat terrain. This unchecked flow, along with sludge material, is the primary source of the ongoing noxious odors permeating the surrounding communities. All the flow in Smugglers is untreated wastewater and you can smell it when you drive down Monument Rd. This source is also largely what the residents smell every night and early morning within Imperial Beach and the surrounding area.

Additionally, the main Tijuana River channel remains a consistent source of swage odors in the river valley. With a current flow rate of 70 MGD, roughly half of which is untreated wastewater, the river contributes significantly to beach closures, with over 1 billion gallons of untreated wastewater discharged into the ocean each month. The flow in the Tijuana River is still very high, which is why we are not seeing significant ponding of water within the main river channel. As a result, the odors from the river channel are not nearly as bad as what is occurring at Smugglers. As the flow starts to drop, we can expect the river channel to start leaving stagnant pools of sewage contaminate water, adding to the already horrific conditions in the river valley.

The pollution in the Tijuana River threatens the health and well-being of everyone living in its vicinity. It is unacceptable to allow the Tijuana River to function as an open sewer for any longer than necessary. Equally distressing is the contamination spreading from Smugglers Canyon into previously pristine areas of the river valley. With over a billion gallons of untreated sewage flowing into the river every month, the situation demands immediate attention. Swift and decisive leadership from the San Diego RWQCB is crucial to address this pressing issue and prevent further harm to our communities.

We believe that IBWC must expedite the cleaning and operation of canyon diverters to effectively control transboundary flows. We also want to see Pump Station CILA turned on as quickly as possible to minimize the amount of transboundary flow. Simultaneously, the City of San Diego must seal the breach in the pilot channel, redirecting Smugglers' flow into the main Tijuana River Channel. By minimizing the extent of sewage ponding in the Tijuana River, we can mitigate the ongoing impacts on air quality and other environmental factors in the river valley.

¹ <https://www.sdsu.edu/files/tijuana-sewage-contamination-public-health-crisis-white-paper-021424.pdf>



Figure 1. Extent of area flooded by Smugglers Canyon sewage flows



Image 1. Breach in City of San Diego Pilot Channel – Smugglers Creek flowing west



Image 2. Ponding of sewage from Smugglers channel



Image 3. Ponding of sewage around County campground in TRV from Smugglers flow

San Diego Regional Camping Ground, which remains flooded in sewage since the January 22, 2024 storm event.

