



International Boundary and Water Commission United States Section

For immediate release
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UPDATE ON STORM DRAIN BLOCKAGE AT SAN DIEGO, CA – TIJUANA, BC BORDER

On Friday, January 3, 2020, the Mexican Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission notified the U.S. Section (USIBWC) that an eight-foot diameter drainage pipe underneath the Tijuana-Ensenada Highway in Tijuana adjacent to the U.S. border was blocked with unknown objects. This caused water to back up in Mexico on the south side of the highway. CESPT, a wastewater utility in Mexico, is in the process of pumping water around the blockage to Smuggler's Gulch, the canyon that drains from Mexico into the United States. The water is then pumped to the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) in San Diego for treatment.

On Monday, January 6, the Principal Engineers from the USIBWC and the Mexican Section conducted a site visit to assess the situation and formulate a plan. Later in the afternoon, the USIBWC and the Mexican Section convened a meeting with stakeholders in the United States to present the strategic plan to minimize any transboundary impacts. The plan included controlled discharges from the ponded area, allowing for regulated discharges of water to Smuggler's Gulch; capture of all flows at Smuggler's Gulch Canyon Collector, a small basin in the U.S., and conveyance of the water for treatment at the SBIWTP; and trash removal from the ponded area so it doesn't enter the U.S.

To implement the plan, the USIBWC, Mexican Section, and CESPT have undertaken the following actions:

- CESPT requested assistance with acquiring pumps and in obtaining equipment and supplies that are not readily available in Mexico to enact pumping solutions. The City of San Diego provided four pumps, while other pumps were obtained in Mexico. Principal Engineers from the USIBWC and Mexican Section assisted with technical expertise and operational needs.
- CESPT and the local Tijuana authorities continue to remove trash and debris from the ponded water area.
- CESPT has a total of eight pumps pumping the water through two 8” pipes and bypassing it under the highway to Smuggler’s Gulch where the USIBWC is capturing the water and sending it to SBIWTP to be treated.
- CESPT has informed the USIBWC that they have hired a private geotechnical contractor to assist with the monitoring of the stability of the highway.
- USIBWC added sand bags at the weir at Smuggler’s Gulch to capture more water and prevent it from flowing into the Tijuana River Valley in the U.S.
- Received information on modeling performed by the University of California at Irvine that indicates removal of the blockage from the pipeline or overflow from the ponded water will not cause flooding in the U.S. All flows would be contained at Smuggler’s Gulch and the Tijuana River Valley.
- Regular meetings are being held with the City and County of San Diego, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Customs and Border Protection (CBP), the California State Water Resources Control Board, and California State Parks.
- Daily communication between the USIBWC and Mexican Section Principal Engineers continues, and daily updates have been provided to the USIBWC from the Mexican Section and CESPT.

The International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico, is responsible for applying the boundary and water treaties between the two countries. In the San Diego-Tijuana area, the Commission is involved with boundary demarcation, Tijuana River flood control, and the operation of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant, which treats wastewater from Tijuana, Mexico to U.S. standards.

For more information:

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