



International Boundary and Water Commission United States and Mexico

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INVESTIGATION FINDS SEWER LINE BREAK AND OTHER WASTEWATER SOURCES AFFECTED THE TIJUANA RIVER

A sewer line break in Tijuana resulted in the bypass of approximately 28 million gallons (105,000 cubic meters) of wastewater into the Tijuana River channel on February 1-4, 2017, according to a report by the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC). In addition, other sewer line problems in the Mexican city affected the Tijuana River Valley in both countries. These included blocked or collapsed pipes and the overflow of sanitary sewers after rainwater entered the sewer system, although the amount from these sources could not be precisely determined. Another finding is that sanitary sewer overflows caused by above-normal rainfall may have begun as early as December 2016.

A binational task force consisting of members of the IBWC's Minute No. 320 Water Quality Work Group investigated the spill at the request of U.S. Commissioner Edward Drusina and Mexican Commissioner Roberto Salmon. The task force, aside from gathering the facts surrounding the sewage spill, made a series of recommendations that include acquiring equipment to prevent or manage spills, establishment of a communication and notification protocol, and an enhancement of data collection and information exchange to assist in speedy detection and response to transboundary sewage spills.

"This report provides concrete recommendations to help us properly respond to and prevent transboundary spills. It also has some reasonable and effective ideas as to how to speed up notifications," said U.S. Commissioner Edward Drusina. "The Commission is committed to partnering with other agencies to use the report's findings to make improvements."

Mexican Commissioner Roberto Salmon indicated that Mexican officials are making all possible efforts to prevent these types of spills from occurring and, should they occur, they are strengthening the notification mechanisms to take preventive measures to help avoid damage in the Tijuana River Valley.

The report documents multiple challenges faced by the Tijuana utility (CESPT) when winter rains entered the city's aged wastewater system and overwhelmed it, causing collectors to collapse and sanitary sewers to overflow. The utility attempted to contain sewage flows while making repairs by directing

wastewater into other pipelines. However, when making repairs at the confluence of two collectors, a 40-inch diameter line and a 42-inch diameter line, CESPT lacked the necessary pumps to divert the large volume so wastewater was bypassed into the river channel over four days. One of the report's recommendations is for CESPT to acquire or borrow pumps when making repairs. Another finding is that 4 other collectors are currently damaged and another 35 secondary lines are also at risk.

Data collected showed bacteria contamination in the Tijuana River throughout the months of December 2016 and January, and February 2017. The report also documented the parties' commitments to provide timely notification of any future transboundary spills.

The Commissioners agreed that some actions should be immediately taken while the Minute No. 320 Water Quality Work Group will be directed to develop a plan to implement the report's other recommendations. The report is available at:

https://www.ibwc.gov/Files/Report_Trans_Bypass_Flows_Tijuana_033117.pdf

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