



## International Boundary and Water Commission United States Section

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### **USIBWC COMMITS TO WORK WITH AGENCIES TO ADDRESS BORDER SANITATION CONCERNS**

The U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) has requested a workshop with San Diego area stakeholders to work cooperatively to address border sanitation concerns at the U.S.-Mexico border. The request was made in a letter dated October 25, 2017 from the U.S. Department of Justice, on behalf of the USIBWC, to the City of Imperial Beach legal counsel, the City of Chula Vista, the San Diego Unified Port District, the City of San Diego, and San Diego County – agencies that recently notified the USIBWC of their intent to sue over water quality concerns if a settlement cannot be reached. The letter expresses the USIBWC’s interest in a collaborative, inclusive approach to resolve the challenges identified by the agencies.

“We want to work with the community to address these concerns cooperatively rather than through litigation,” said U.S. Commissioner Edward Drusina. “The USIBWC continues to work with our partners to take concrete actions to improve sanitation conditions at the border.”

The USIBWC has undertaken the following actions:

- Developed an international agreement known as Minute No. 320, “General Framework for Binational Cooperation on Transboundary Issues in the Tijuana River Basin,” which establishes a Binational Core Group and Binational Works Groups with stakeholder involvement to focus on priority issues of sediment, solid waste, and water quality.
- Prepared a Scope of Work to develop a diagnostic for the existing binational diversion and pumping system that conveys wastewater in the Tijuana River for treatment, and to develop new alternatives for additional infrastructure in the United States and/or Mexico. The Scope of Work responds to stakeholder requests to consider new infrastructure on the U.S. side of the border to reduce the impact of transboundary wastewater flows. The Border Environment Cooperation Commission has agreed to fund the study, which will look at options such as purchase additional pumps or other pumping changes to improve reliability, reduce flows to the Tijuana River through reuse and aquifer recharge, and mitigate the effects on transboundary flows. The study is expected to be completed sometime next year.
- Initiated development of a project for construction of a sediment basin east of Dairy Mart Bridge, using the results of a Corps of Engineers study funded by the City of San Diego to conduct a feasibility study and develop conceptual plans. USIBWC expects to complete the feasibility study, Environmental Impact Statement, and design by early 2020, with construction of the sediment basin to occur thereafter, subject to the availability of appropriations and any permitting requirements.

- Developed an updated plan for regular water quality monitoring in the Tijuana River Basin and began working with U.S. Customs and Border Protection to develop a special monitoring program to focus on transboundary flow in the canyons.
- Worked with the Mexican Section of the IBWC to finalize operating protocols for Pump Station CILA to ensure more reliable operation of the equipment that diverts wastewater out of the river.
- Installed a new flow meter to provide real-time information about the status of the pump and river flow while the Mexican Section of the Commission has installed three flow meters. With this new equipment, there will be real-time alerts of any flows not captured at the pump station and when debris may be impeding pump operations.
- Enacted a plan to conduct binational inspections every other month at key sites that are known to contribute to transboundary wastewater flows followed by binational meetings, and arranged to conduct more frequent inspections or inspections at additional sites as needed.
- Developed a revised and more detailed binational spill notification protocol. The protocol provides for quick communication between the United States and Mexico, and prompt notification to U.S. stakeholders. Mexican authorities have also developed a notification protocol for transboundary spills between Mexican agencies.
- Completed a Scope of Work for a trash boom study. The study will consider the possible construction of a structure to capture trash for disposal to reduce solid waste in the Tijuana River Valley.
- Implemented a \$17-million dollar project at the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant to improve secondary treatment under peak flow conditions, scheduled for completion in early 2018. This is in addition to the \$335 million dollars in capital expenditures by the U.S. government since 1991 to construct the plant and associated infrastructure.
- Coordinated with Mexican authorities regarding some \$12 million dollars from the State of Baja California for emergency repairs to the Tijuana sanitation system and purchase of needed equipment. Using the emergency funds, work is well underway by the Tijuana utility (CESPT) to repair damaged collectors and acquire equipment, such as pumping trucks, compaction equipment, cameras to inspect the sewage collection network, etc.
- Established a monthly newsletter to update on implementation of recommendations made in the Commission's report on a February 2017 sewage spill.
- Continue to hold meetings of the Minute 320 Work Groups and Core Group to ensure proper coordination with interested stakeholders in both countries who want to help solve the environmental problems in the Tijuana River Basin.
- Drafted a Memorandum of Agreement with the California Regional Water Quality Control Board that will enable USIBWC to perform additional water and soil testing to determine the type of contamination and help determine the sources.
- Continue to conduct quarterly public meetings of the USIBWC Citizens Forum to provide regular updates to the general public.

According to the Department of Justice letter, the International Boundary and Water Commission, United States and Mexico (IBWC), "is serious about working with state and local partners to improve the health of the Tijuana River watershed." The letter proposes an inclusive process to address the matters

identified in the Notice of Intent to sue and, to that end, requests a workshop with stakeholders to resolve the concerns quickly.

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