

**CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD
SAN DIEGO REGION**

**EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
MARCH 10, 2021**

ITEM 6

SUBJECT

Informational Item: Update on Asset Management and Infrastructure Issues at the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC), South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP) (*Vicente Rodriguez and Keith Yaeger*)

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

This is an informational item and the Board will not take an action.

KEY ISSUE

Critical wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure inadequacies along the California - Mexico international border degrade water quality in the Tijuana River Valley and adjacent beach coastal waters and also pose a significant public health risk to residents and visitors along both sides of the border. Uncertainty about the condition of wastewater infrastructure assets and lack of comprehensive planning often leads to a reactive approach to maintenance and the occurrence of emergency situations stemming from infrastructure asset failures.

PRACTICAL VISION

Chapter 4 of the San Diego Water Board Practical Vision,¹ *Proactive Public Outreach and Communication*, is focused on implementing the core values of leadership, communication, and transparency. This agenda item provides an opportunity for the San Diego Water Board and the public to hear USIBWC's perspective on the challenges and barriers to maintaining the operational integrity of the SBIWTP and other critical wastewater collection and treatment infrastructure along both sides of the California - Mexico international border.

DISCUSSION

In July 1990, the United States (U.S.) and Mexico approved IBWC Minute 283 to provide proper collection, treatment, and final disposal of sewage flows in the Tijuana River prior to crossing into the U.S. As part of Minute 283, diversion and treatment systems were implemented in both the City of Tijuana, Mexico, and San Diego County as a binational solution to capture wastewater flows and to provide treatment and final disposal of the flows. Under normal operating conditions dry weather flows in the Tijuana River in Mexico are diverted to the CILA Pump Station, located just upstream of the international border and into the International Collector. From there the flows may be conveyed to either the

¹ The San Diego Water Board Practical Vision is available at:
https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water_issues/programs/practical_vision/

South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP), located in the U.S, or sent through a second dual-pump station (“PB1A” and “PB1B”) located in Mexico and then conveyed to Mexico’s San Antonio de Los Buenos Wastewater Treatment Plant.

In terms of flow volume, approximately 25 million gallons per day (MGD) of wastewater flows from the sewage collection system in Tijuana are conveyed through the International Collector to the SBIWTP. Additional wastewater flows from the Tijuana sewage collection system and diverted Tijuana River flows, averaging 40 MGD, are sent through the dual pump station PB1A and PB1B in Mexico and then conveyed to Mexico’s San Antonio de Los Buenos Wastewater Treatment Plant. This facility has the capacity to partially treat only 10 MGD of the flow. Excess flows are discharged as untreated wastewater to the Pacific Ocean shoreline, approximately 5.6 miles south of the U.S./Mexico border.

USIBWC has reported that due to an increase in wastewater flows in Mexico, the dual-pump station PB1A and PB1B is periodically overflowing and wastewater is entering the U.S. at Stewart’s Drain. Additionally, since August 2020, Junction Box 1 (JB1), a gate valve that USIBWC uses to control the volume of waste entering the SBIWTP, has been inoperable. It is the San Diego Water Board’s understanding that USIBWC currently has only limited ability to control the amount of wastewater flows entering the SBIWTP, and the Stewart’s Drain canyon collector is unable to divert flow to the SBIWTP when the collector pipeline from Mexico to the SBIWTP is at capacity. Relevant locations are shown in **Supporting Document No. 1**.

From November 1, 2020 through January 31, 2020, USIBWC reported at least 15 dry weather transboundary flows² through Stewarts Drain that bypassed the collector system and resulted in a discharge of more than 1.1 million gallons of untreated wastewater to a drainage channel tributary to the Tijuana River. USIBWC’s monitoring reports for November and December 2020 documented excessive flows into the SBIWTP and alleged exceedances of effluent limitations of the National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System (NPDES) permit for several constituents including turbidity, carbonaceous biochemical oxygen demand, total suspended solids, and settleable solids.

PUBLIC NOTICE

Notice of the opportunity to comment on this informational item was posted on the San Diego Water Board website and sent to all known interested persons by email on February 8, 2021 (**Supporting Document No. 2**). Notice was also provided in the Meeting Notice and Agenda for the March 10, 2021 Board meeting, which was posted on the San Diego Water Board website.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS

1. Location Map
2. Notice of Opportunity to Comment

² Final accounting of the number and volume of transboundary flows occurs when USIBWC submits their monthly monitoring report pursuant to Order No. R9-2014-0009, NPDES No. CA0108928, *Waste Discharge Requirements for the United States Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission, South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant, Discharge to the Pacific Ocean via the South Bay Ocean Outfall*.