

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

**EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT  
JUNE 10, 2026**

**ITEM 7**

**SUBJECT**

United States International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) Oral Report: Spill and Transboundary Flow Events, Influent Action Levels and Source Control Requirements, State of the Ocean, State of the Tijuana River Valley, and Update on the Expansion of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (SBIWTP). (Riley Nolan)

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Informational item only; no recommendation.

**KEY ISSUE**

The SBIWTP is owned by USIBWC and operated under contract by Veolia North America. The SBIWTP is permitted to treat up to 35 million gallons per day (MGD), as a monthly average, of sewage and other wastewater flows originating in Mexico. USIBWC's discharge from the SBIWTP is currently regulated under Order No. R9-2021-0001 as amended (NPDES Permit).

USIBWC's NPDES Permit for the SBIWTP requires periodic oral reports to the San Diego Water Board on the following subjects: Spill and Transboundary Flow Events, Influent Action Levels and Source Control Requirements, State of the Ocean, and State of the Tijuana River Valley. To fulfill its permit obligation, USIBWC will cover these topics in its oral presentation to the Board.<sup>1</sup> USIBWC will also provide an update on the ongoing rehabilitation and expansion of the SBIWTP to 50 MGD of full secondary treatment and other efforts regarding public engagement and transparency.

**PRACTICAL VISION**

Addressing water quality impairments from transboundary flows is one of the San Diego Water Board's highest priorities consistent with its Key Beneficial Uses and Key Areas approach, adopted in Chapter 1 of the Practical Vision.<sup>2</sup> The lower Tijuana River, Tijuana River Estuary, and the Region's nearshore coastal waters fall under the highest-ranking priority for water bodies with beneficial uses associated with recreation, habitats and ecosystems, and fish and shellfish consumption.

Chapter 4 of the San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision cites pollution in the Tijuana River Valley and surrounding beaches as a significant environmental justice issue for

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<sup>1</sup> USIBWC will supplement its presentation with a written State of the Ocean Report.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water\\_issues/programs/practical\\_vision/](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water_issues/programs/practical_vision/)

the Region. Transboundary pollution in the San Diego-Tijuana region disproportionately impacts disadvantaged and underserved communities on both sides of the border.

Chapter 8 of the Practical Vision calls for the San Diego Water Board to provide effective community engagement and communication. This informational item advances transparency and the two-way flow of information between members of the public, Board members, and USIBWC staff.

## **DISCUSSION**

Limitations within Tijuana's collection and conveyance system result in discharges of wastewater to the concrete-lined main channel of the Tijuana River in Mexico. This frequently results in polluted transboundary flows through the main channel of the Tijuana River that reach the Tijuana River Valley, Tijuana River Estuary, and the Pacific Ocean shoreline adjacent to the river mouth.

Transboundary flows of untreated domestic and industrial wastewater originating in Tijuana result in significant and prolonged water quality impairments in the lower Tijuana River, Tijuana River Estuary, and San Diego's nearshore coastal waters. Poor water quality conditions stemming from transboundary flows result in prolonged beach closures in southern San Diego County and degraded air quality, particularly in the communities of Imperial Beach, Nestor, and San Ysidro, with disadvantaged communities bearing the brunt of the pollution. Accordingly, controlling transboundary flows from Mexico and improving border water quality is one of the San Diego Water Board's highest priorities.

USIBWC is the primary United States federal agency responsible for providing solutions to sanitation and water quality issues that arise in the border region. These responsibilities include the proper operation and maintenance of critical wastewater infrastructure, including the SBIWTP, to prevent and reduce transboundary flows of untreated domestic and industrial wastewater. USIBWC is responsible for coordination with its Mexican counterpart (MxIBWC) to minimize transboundary flows and ensure that international wastewater infrastructure functions effectively to protect public health and environmental resources along the border.

USIBWC's annual update on **Spill and Transboundary Flow Events** is designed to keep regulators and the members of the public aware of its actions to prevent, and respond to, transboundary flows and spills in the region's binational waters. This update is a critical tool to advance transparency on a subject with significant environmental, economic, and public health implications, and to promote a two-way dialogue between Board members, USIBWC staff, and members of the public.

USIBWC's update on **Influent Action Levels and Source Control** in Mexico keeps the San Diego Water Board and members of the public informed of influent wastewater quality at the SBIWTP. USIBWC is required to monitor influent parameters that cannot be treated by the SBIWTP's standard biological treatment process. Monitoring influent action levels and coordinating with Mexico is critical, as there is a strong industrial presence in Tijuana, with no known industrial pre-treatment program in the sewershed.

USIBWC, together with the City of San Diego (City), submits a joint **State of the Ocean Report** for the comingled discharge from the SBIWTP and the City-owned South Bay Water Reclamation Plant through the South Bay Ocean Outfall. This report provides a comprehensive assessment of receiving water conditions and long-term water-quality trends. USIBWC will provide a short verbal update on receiving water conditions, followed by the submittal of a comprehensive written State of the Ocean Report by July 1, 2026.

USIBWC's **State of the Tijuana River Valley** update will outline all monitoring that has been completed in the Tijuana River Valley, the status and trends of Tijuana River Valley water quality conditions, and any plans for future monitoring efforts. This update is an important opportunity to advance transparency and provides a public forum for members of the public and Board members to engage with USIBWC staff on water quality conditions in the Tijuana River Valley.

USIBWC will also provide an **update on the expansion of the SBIWTP** to 50 MGD of full secondary treatment, including the status and timeline of the project. This expansion is a critical component of Minutes 328 and 333 and the June 2023 Joint Record of Decision between USIBWC and the United States Environmental Protection Agency for the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement Mitigation of Contaminated Transboundary Flows Project. The SBIWTP expansion to 50 MGD of full secondary treatment will significantly increase Tijuana's wastewater treatment capacity. This update is an important action to advance transparency and provide an opportunity for members of the public and Board members to engage with USIBWC.

On May 12, 2021, the San Diego Water Board adopted Order No. R9-2021-0001, which prescribed waste discharge requirements for the SBIWTP. Since the San Diego Water Board had determined, based on effluent data, that the SBIWTP discharge threatened to violate effluent limitations in Order No. R9-2021-0001, the San Diego Water Board also issued Cease and Desist Order (CDO) No. R9-2021-0107 (2021 CDO) on the same day. The 2021 CDO established a time schedule for USIBWC to complete necessary maintenance and repairs, and other deliverables to achieve compliance with effluent limitations in its NPDES Permit.

In December 2023, the San Diego Water Board adopted Time Schedule Order (TSO) No. R9-2023-0189. The TSO established a revised time schedule for USIBWC to complete necessary maintenance and repairs to achieve compliance with effluent limitations in the NPDES Permit by August 15, 2024.

After considerable prioritization of and investment in rehabilitation of the SBIWTP, USIBWC attained compliance with all effluent limitations in November 2024. From November 2024 to August 2025, USIBWC reported two effluent violations: 1) the settleable solids instantaneous maximum concentration of 5 milliliters per liter (ml/L) exceeded the effluent limitation of 3 ml/L in February 2025 and 2) the 30-day average total suspended solids (TSS) percent removal of 84.09 percent did not meet the minimum required removal of 85 percent in April 2025.

On August 27, 2025, the San Diego Water Board adopted CDO No. R9-2025-0139 (2025 CDO) in response to USIBWC's planned 10-MGD accelerated incremental expansion of the SBIWTP. As of May 2026, USIBWC has complied with all elements of the 2025 CDO.

On April 8, 2026, the San Diego Water Board adopted Order No. R9-2026-0005 which amended USIBWC's NPDES Permit to authorize the 10-MGD accelerated incremental expansion.

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

The agenda notice for today's meeting was posted on the San Diego Water Board's website and sent to subscribers to the email list for Board meetings. This satisfies the Bagley-Keene Open Meeting Act requirements to publish the meeting notice and agenda.

### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

None.