# EPA urges Mexico to stop sewage and chemical discharge polluting Southern California beaches



The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has called on Mexico to halt the discharge of billions of gallons of sewage and toxic chemicals from Tijuana into the Pacific Ocean, an issue that has severely affected Southern California's coastline, led to beach closures, and resulted in health problems for those training in the water, including Navy SEALs.

Lee Zeldin, head of the EPA, made these comments during an Earth Day visit to the California-Mexico border. During his trip, Zeldin toured the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant in San Diego County, a facility on the U.S. side designed to treat 25 million gallons of sewage daily, and undertook an aerial survey of the Tijuana River to observe the issue firsthand.

Zeldin revealed that the EPA would soon present Mexico with a detailed list of projects aimed at tackling the long-standing environmental crisis. However, he did not specify what measures the United States might impose if Mexico fails to comply. He stated, “We’re going to know whether or not Mexico is going to do its part to resolve it, and then we’ll go from there, as far as strategy and tactics.” While acknowledging that President Donald Trump is highly concerned about the issue, Zeldin mentioned they have yet to discuss potential tariffs or other punitive actions.

The Tijuana River runs approximately 120 miles (195 kilometres), beginning in Mexico and passing through southern California before emptying into the Pacific Ocean. Over the years, the river has become a conduit for increasing amounts of sewage, heavy with industrial chemicals and waste, stemming from population growth and industrial expansion in Tijuana. Since 2018, it has been estimated that over 100 billion gallons of raw sewage and pollutants have entered the river.

The pollution has had a wide-reaching impact, affecting swimmers, surfers, lifeguards, schoolchildren, Border Patrol agents, and others, with scientists indicating that toxic vapours can become airborne when sewage foams. The U.S. Navy is currently reviewing whether to relocate its Naval Special Warfare training centre in San Diego following reports of 1,168 cases of acute gastrointestinal illness among SEAL recruits between 2019 and 2023.

In addition to the public health concerns, the contaminated waters have forced frequent closures of surrounding Californian beaches over the past four years. Since 2020, more than $653 million has been allocated to combat the pollution issue, yet progress remains stalled, largely due to delays on the Mexican side, according to Zeldin.

The EPA chief expressed hope that the new Mexican administration under President Claudia Sheinbaum, who took office in October, would engage more constructively. Zeldin reported a positive meeting with Mexican officials in San Diego, suggesting strong collaborative intentions. “What’s being communicated by the new Mexican president is an intense desire to fully resolve this situation,” he said. Nonetheless, Zeldin emphasised the urgency, stating, “There’s no way that we are going to stand before the people of California and ask them to have more patience and just bear with all of us as we go through the next 10 or 20 or 30 years of being stuck in 12 feet of raw sewage and not getting anywhere. So we are all out of patience.”

Zeldin also pointed out the bipartisan support within the U.S. for addressing the crisis, with lawmakers from both parties backing cleanup efforts.

Alicia Bárcena, Mexico’s Environment Secretary, met with Zeldin to discuss binational projects aimed at restoring environmental health to the border region, following a request from President Sheinbaum. However, Mexico’s Environment and Natural Resources Secretariat (Semarnat) had not issued an immediate public response to the EPA’s statements.

Mexico is currently developing several wastewater treatment initiatives and plans to modernise existing facilities to reduce sewage discharge. Zeldin insisted, though, that additional measures must be completed, such as installing floodgates to capture trash in the Tijuana River and investigating a proposal to divert 10 million gallons of sewage from the shore.

The EPA’s stance highlights the ongoing complications in managing cross-border environmental issues and underscores the collaborative and diplomatic efforts between the U.S. and Mexico to mitigate a persistent pollution crisis affecting critical coastal areas.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## References

* <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/us-and-mexico-agree-invest-474m-address-tijuana-river-sewage-problem> - Confirms the joint investment by the US and Mexico to address the Tijuana River sewage problem, supporting the claim of ongoing binational efforts and significant funding towards the pollution crisis.
* <https://www.epa.gov/sustainable-water-infrastructure/usmca-tijuana-river-watershed> - Provides detailed information on the Tijuana River watershed, including how sewage and contaminated flows from Mexico enter the US and discharge into the Pacific Ocean, corroborating the geography and pollution description.
* <https://www.slc.ca.gov/trv-transboundary-pollution-crisis/> - Explains the transboundary pollution crisis affecting the Tijuana River Valley, including untreated wastewater flows, contaminated sediment, and trash influxes, which supports the article's description of environmental degradation and public health impacts.
* <https://www.sdcoastkeeper.org/environmental-groups-sue-federal-government-to-spur-action-in-tijuana-sewage-crisis/> - Details the discharge of sewage and toxic chemicals by the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant and its violation of the Clean Water Act, confirming the facility's role and the resulting health problems and beach closures.
* <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-administrator-tours-south-bay-international-wastewater-treatment-plant-address-tijuana-river> - Reports EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin's visit to the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant and his comments on the Tijuana River pollution issue, supporting the article's account of his Earth Day border visit and EPA's planned project list.