# EPA head visits California-Mexico border to tackle Tijuana River pollution crisis



Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Administrator Lee Zeldin visited the California-Mexico border on April 22 to address the significant pollution issues stemming from the flow of raw sewage and toxic chemicals from Mexico into the Tijuana River. This pollution has severely impacted the Pacific Ocean waters off Southern California, leading to beach closures, the creation of toxic hotspots along the river, and health risks to personnel such as Navy SEALs who train in the area on the U.S. side of the border.

During his Earth Day trip, Zeldin toured the South Bay International Wastewater Plant located on the U.S. side. This facility is currently undergoing expansion to better handle the sewage inflow originating from Mexico. He also met with Navy officials, including SEAL members, and participated in a helicopter tour of the border alongside U.S. Customs and Border Protection agents. Emphasising the broader consequences of the environmental crisis, Zeldin stated, "The Americans on our side of the border who have been dealing with this ... for decades, are out of patience. 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 ft of raw sewage and not getting anywhere."

The EPA is preparing to present Mexico with a comprehensive list of projects designed to resolve the ongoing environmental crisis in the Tijuana River Valley. The pollution results not only from raw sewage but also hazardous chemicals released from an expanding industrial base in Mexico. For decades, these contaminants have crossed into southern San Diego County through the river, prompting repeated beach closures and air quality warnings that have been in effect since 2018.

Mexico's military is currently involved in constructing an international collector system intended to more effectively contain and capture sewage flows on their side of the border. However, part of this project has necessitated sending approximately 5 million gallons per day (MGD) of raw sewage into the Tijuana River since April 9, according to Mexican government reports. Maria-Elena Giner, outgoing commissioner for the U.S. section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), explained the difficult decision to divert sewage into the river temporarily: "They told us this was a difficult decision and spent days looking at other alternatives. In the end, the team working 24/7 on this complex and extremely important project felt they had exhausted all other options and found a path to mitigate the amount of flow to the river from a potential of about 25 MGD to 5 MGD."

Giner further detailed that the current phase involves drying and rebuilding a junction box with reinforced concrete, which necessitates diverting some sewage flow into the river. Despite most sewage being redirected to the Mexican coast, around 5 MGD continues to enter the Tijuana River.

The border visit drew attendance from several officials, including Representatives Darrell Issa (R-Calif.), Juan Vargas (D-Calif.), Mike Levin (D-Calif.), Sara Jacobs (D-Calif.), former Representatives Mike Garcia and Brian Bilbray, and Chad McIntosh, newly appointed commissioner for the U.S. Section of the IBWC, succeeding Giner. The group toured multiple locations along the border and the South Bay plant to witness the environmental and community impacts firsthand.

The visit also included an April 21 meeting between Zeldin and Alicia Bárcena, Mexico’s Secretary of the Environment and Natural Resources, alongside other Mexican officials. Zeldin characterised the discussion as focused on "ending decades of raw sewage entering the U.S. from Mexico," and noted a positive tone in the talks. "It was clear in the way that the Mexican environmental secretary approached every aspect of this meeting yesterday ... that she wants to have a strong collaborative relationship," he said. "I welcome that collaboration."

Imperial Beach Mayor Paloma Aguirre, present at the wastewater treatment facility tour, expressed urgency for resolving the crisis. "It’s absolutely pivotal that we get this done as fast as possible," she said. Aguirre and other local leaders have long advocated for the EPA to designate the entire South Bay area of San Diego County as a superfund site due to persistent pollution issues. Although Zeldin denied this request on March 14, he indicated that concerns about military readiness might influence future consideration of such a designation.

Concluding the visit, Zeldin emphasised the need for a comprehensive and expedient plan to end the pollution problem: "The plan needs to be all-encompassing to end this crisis. It must all be finished as rapidly as possible, and it must be completed in a way that also plans for the future, with Tijuana’s population continuing to increase. I hope this is the start of a new collaborative relationship of transparency and honesty, and one laser-focused on cleaning up the river and keeping it clean for decades to come.”

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.epa.gov/newsreleases/epa-administrator-lee-zeldin-visits-san-diego-survey-tijuana-river-sewage-crisis> - This URL corroborates the visit of EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin to San Diego to address the Tijuana River sewage crisis. It details his activities during the trip, including meetings with local leaders and a tour of the wastewater treatment plant.
2. <https://www.kpbs.org/news/environment/2025/04/22/epa-head-visits-san-diego-to-examine-border-sewage-crisis> - This URL supports the information about Lee Zeldin's visit to San Diego and his discussions with Mexican officials to address the border sewage crisis. It mentions the urgent need for resolving the issue and the collaboration with Mexican authorities.
3. <https://www.cbs8.com/article/news/local/cross-border-contamination/epa-lee-zeldin-visit-us-mexico-border-amid-sewage-crisis/509-e2a72c71-0653-4b87-bad9-33d392a44648> - This URL confirms EPA Administrator Lee Zeldin's visit to the U.S.-Mexico border to assess the ongoing sewage crisis affecting South Bay communities.
4. <https://www.noahwire.com> - This URL is the source of the article itself, providing a foundation for the claims regarding the Tijuana River pollution crisis and Lee Zeldin's visit.
5. <https://www.borderreport.com/news/border-pollution-and-sewage-issues-persist-despite-ongoing-efforts/> - Unfortunately, this URL is not available in the search results, but it would typically provide information on the persistent pollution and sewage issues at the U.S.-Mexico border.
6. <https://www.environews.org/archive/ibwc-remediation-efforts-tijuana-river/> - This URL is not available in the search results; however, it would generally discuss remediation efforts by the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC) regarding the Tijuana River pollution.
7. <https://www.enr.com/articles/60646-epa-chief-demands-urgent-action-by-mexico-to-fix-tijuana-sewage-problems> - Please view link - unable to able to access data