

# Tijuana River Valley Sewage Emergency



County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency (HHSA)  
[SANDIEGOCOUNTY.GOV/HHSA](https://sandiegocounty.gov/hhsa)

**SEWAGE/CHEMICAL  
CONTAMINATED WATER**

**WATER CONTACT  
MAY CAUSE ILLNESS**



BY ORDER OF THE HEALTH OFFICER  
COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO  
ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & QUALITY  
(619) 336-2073 [sdbeachinfo.com](http://sdbeachinfo.com)



# ACE Goals and Objectives

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- **Goal:** Assess individual-level impacts through an *on-line survey* related to sewage exposure from the Tijuana River Valley
- **Objectives:**
  - Understand concerns of air and water exposure from contamination
  - Explore concerns about residential, occupational, recreational and other environmental exposures and health effects
  - Obtain parents' responses on behalf of children under age 18

# CASPER\* vs. ACE

	CASPER	ACE
Level	<b>Household</b> summary responses	<b>Individual-level</b> responses
Method	In person interview	Self-administered on-line survey
Eligibility	Residents only	Residents, workers, visitors
Children	Child data captured as part of household response	Parents/guardians could answer for individual children
Timing	October 18 -20,2024	October 21 - November 25,2024
Sample	189 households interviewed	2099 completed surveys
Locations	Imperial Beach, Nestor, San Ysidro	Imperial Beach, Nestor, San Ysidro, Otay Mesa West, Silver Strand, Coronado

\*Community Assessment for Public Health  
Emergency Response

# Key Findings: ACE

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- 92% were concerned about air quality; 86% were concerned about tap water quality
- 95% reported noticing a sewage smell in the preceding 30 days; 57% said it was severe
- 24% reported direct contact with contaminated river or beach water including workers
- 64% reported at least one new or worsening physical health symptom they attributed to the Sewage Crisis in the past 30 days
- Most common symptoms attributed to the Crisis were headache or respiratory symptoms; 31% of those reporting sought medical care
- 28% of participants reported symptoms of anxiety; 21% reported symptoms of depression. Rates were higher among those reporting severe sewage smell

# ACE Findings Similar to CASPER

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- Widespread community concern about the sewage crisis, including air and drinking water quality concerns
- Most respondents use bottled water in the affected area
- Most respondents reported physical health symptom(s) they attributed to the sewage crisis
- Respondents also attributed mental health symptoms to the sewage crisis
- Preferred communications channels: word of mouth, TV, internet news, email, and text message
- Needs of respondents: action, water, medical or mental health care or supplies, improve water/air quality

# County of San Diego: Actions Already Being Taken



# County of San Diego Action

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- **Collaboration, Coordination, & Advocacy for South Bay Communities**
  - South Bay School Districts Leadership
  - South Bay Health Care Clinics
  - All Agency Meeting- Ongoing Monthly meeting with local, state, and federal governmental partners

## Local

- San Diego Air Pollution Control District
- County of San Diego
- San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board
- Imperial Beach, Chula Vista, San Diego, and Coronado Cities

## State

- California Environmental Protection Agency
- State Water Resource Control Board
- California Department of Public Health
- Coastal Commission
- California Air Resources Board (CARB)

## Federal

- US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR)
- Office of Community Health Hazard Assessment (OCHHA)
- National Center for Environmental Health
- International Boundary & Water Commission (IBWC)

## County of San Diego Action

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- **Collaboration, Coordination, & Advocacy: Public Health Assessment (PHA)**
  - In June 2025, ATSDR confirmed a Public Health Assessment (PHA) will be conducted. Activities include:
    - Analyze air, surface water, sediment, soil, fish tissue, and air quality complaint data to evaluate past, current, and future chemical exposures.
    - Identify information gaps and uncertainties where there is not enough data to determine health risks.
  - Sign up to receive email updates about ATSDR's public health assessment by contacting Ben Gerhardstein ([bgerhardstein@cdc.gov](mailto:bgerhardstein@cdc.gov)) in the ATSDR Region 9 office.



## County of San Diego Action

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- Collaboration, Coordination, & Advocacy: State of Emergency Request



# County of San Diego Actions

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## ■ Drinking Water Concerns

- In October 2024, a letter was sent by Public Health Officer to State Water Board, Deputy Secretary and Special Council on Water Policy with specific actions:
  - **Educate the community** through proactive outreach, media, and social media on how drinking water is tested and kept safe in their community
  - Explore increasing the **frequency of testing of drinking water** to ensure the water remains safe and share these results with the community
- Met with the four water agencies and CDPH to share the CASPER and ACE results to advocate for increased messaging on the safety of their water to residents

# County of San Diego Actions

## ■ Mental Health Concerns

- Working with County Behavioral Health Services (BHS) on education and health promotion
  - [Mental Wellness Resource Directory](#)
  - [Community Toolkit](#) available in multiple languages
  - Distributed mental health resources during ACE survey to South Bay
- Promote 988 crisis line for resources and mental health evaluations
- Focused partnership with South Region Outpatient Providers
  - BHS' Communication & Engagement Team
  - South Region Collaborative



## BHS Action

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- BHS Team has been actively communicating information to provider network
- Emphasis on ensuring awareness by programs serving individuals in the south region



BHS Providers have reported sharing the PowerPoint with their staff



Some programs report clients presenting with anxiety surrounding long-term and short-term health impacts



Clinicians offer support and build skills in managing reported feelings of hopelessness



Caregivers share asthma flare-ups for kids resulting in missing school and therapy appointments

# Live Well San Diego South Region Community Leadership Team Behavioral & Mental Health Resources Tip Card



## BEHAVIORAL & MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES TIP CARD

*\*Services are free, confidential, and trauma-informed*



211 San Diego is a local nonprofit organization, connecting you to the community and health services you need. 211 San Diego manages an online database of free or low-cost services, maintains a community calendar of events, and operates a multilingual contact center. Call 2-1-1, 24 hours a day, in any language, to get help finding available resources.

[www.211sandiego.org](http://www.211sandiego.org)



If you or someone you know is in emotional distress, dialing 9-8-8 can help. This three-digit nationwide phone number can connect you to San Diego County's Access & Crisis Line. Trained experts can help you figure out support options for you or your loved one at no-cost, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

[www.988lifeline.org](http://www.988lifeline.org)



Get connected to numerous organizations in San Diego County that provide resources that assist individuals experiencing mental health difficulties and/or can provide more information about mental health. Visit the Check-Your-Mood website to learn about the many groups who may provide additional support.

[www.livewellsd.org/events/check-your-mood](http://www.livewellsd.org/events/check-your-mood)



## SALUD MENTAL

*\*Los servicios son gratuitos, confidenciales, y basados en la atención normada del trauma*



[www.211sandiego.org](http://www.211sandiego.org)



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con los servicios comunitarios y de salud que necesita. 211 San Diego administra una base de datos en línea de servicios gratuitos o de bajo costo, mantiene un calendario comunitario de eventos y dispone de un centro de contacto multilingüe. Llame al 2-1-1, las 24 horas del día, en cualquier idioma, para recibir ayuda en la búsqueda de los recursos disponibles.

Si usted o alguien que conoce está pasando por una crisis emocional, marque al 9-8-8. Este número puede conectarlo a la Línea de Acceso y Crisis del Condado de San Diego donde quiera que esté dentro de los Estados Unidos. Expertos capacitados pueden ayudarlo a encontrar opciones de apoyo para usted o su ser querido sin costo, las 24 horas del día, los 7 días de la semana.

Conéctese con diversas organizaciones en el condado de San Diego que ofrecen recursos para personas que enfrentan dificultades de salud mental y/o pueden proporcionar más información sobre el tema. Visite el sitio web Check-Your-Mood para conocer los grupos que pueden brindar apoyo adicional.

3/25/25

- Over 7,000 cards distributed across 12 ZIP Codes

❖ The Live Well San Diego South Region Community Leadership Team Behavioral & Mental Health Work Group presents the Behavioral & Mental Health Resources Tip Card. This pocket-sized tip card helps connect San Diego County residents with free, confidential, and trauma-informed services. The tip card can be printed or shared digitally to spread the word!

- Help distribute these cards by scanning the QR code below.



## Other Efforts

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- **San Diego County Air Pollution Control District (APCD)**
  - H2S Monitoring Network
    - Data available through [online dashboard](#)
    - Issue air quality advisories and updates
  - Air Purifier distribution
    - [AIRE Program](#)
      - Online Registration Portal
      - Direct Delivery from Manufacturer
      - Additional Partner Distribution Events



# County of San Diego Actions



## ■ Supporting Air Purifier Distribution

### - Community Health Worker Support

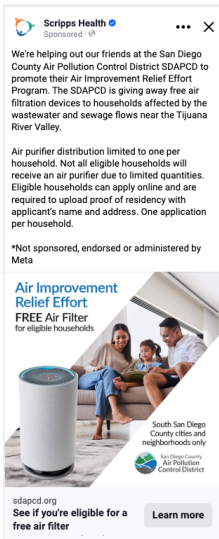
- Actively enroll residents at **community events**
- Phone calls/emails followed by door-to-door efforts to inform and enroll at **in-home day-care centers**
- Through June 30, distributed information in English and Spanish **through 342 South Bay Community events, reaching 16,196 residents.**

## ACE Survey Integration

- ACE survey recipient emails to **1,900 people**

## Linked APCD to County Partners

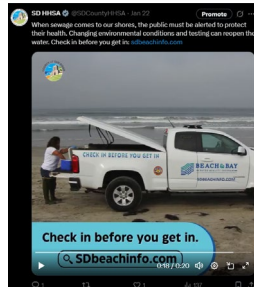
- South Region Healthcare Providers, School Districts, Managed Care Providers, & San Diego & Imperial Counties Border Health Collaborative



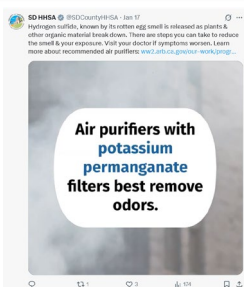
# County of San Diego Actions: Communications

- More than 321,436 social media impressions
- Targeted South Bay zip codes on Facebook, Instagram and NextDoor in English and Spanish
  - May: H2S Level Guidance – 74,562
  - April: Free Air Purifiers - 66,477
  - October ACE Survey participation - 49,844
  - October ACE Survey participation in Spanish - 5,200

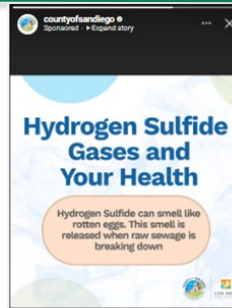
## Beach/Bay Water



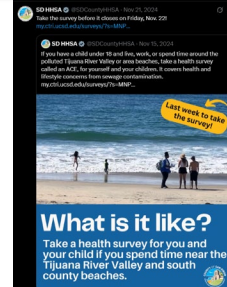
## Air Purifiers



## H2S and Your Health



## ACE Survey



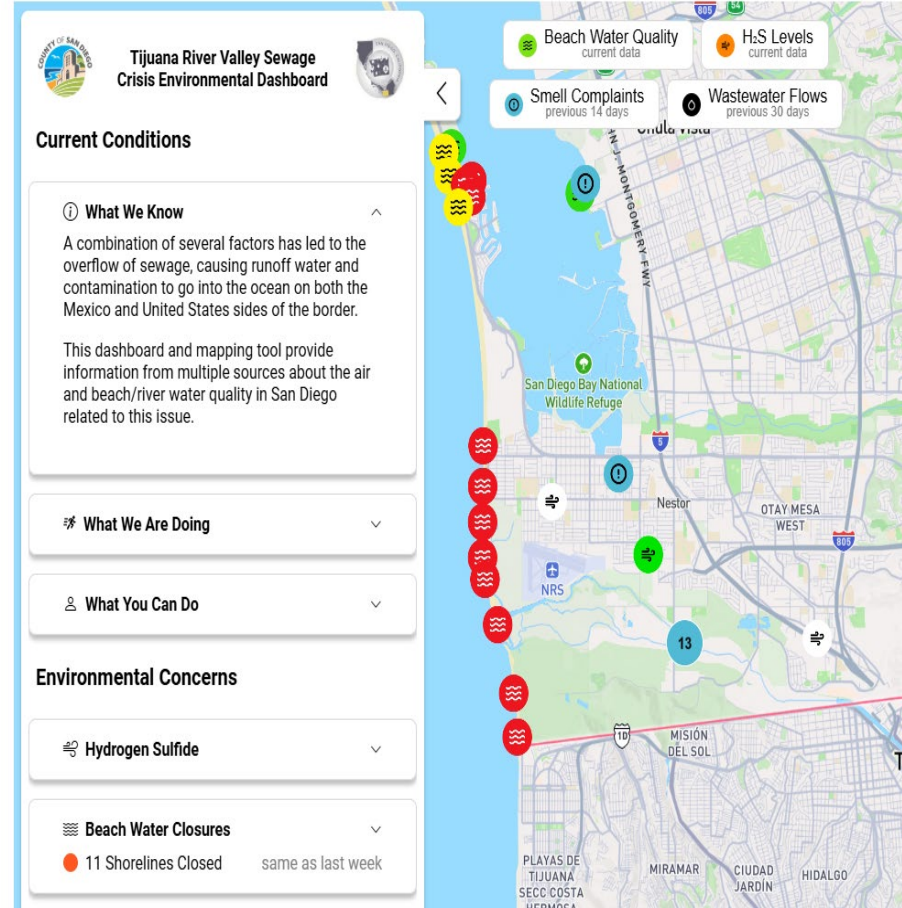
## nextdoor



# County of San Diego Actions: Communications

## TJRV Environmental Dashboard

- Pulls multiple data sources into one:
  - Beach water quality
  - H2S levels
  - Air quality complaints
  - Wastewater flows
  - [Environmental Dashboard](#)



# County of San Diego: Communication Plan

County News Center, Media, Social Medi
Website Update w/Dashboard
Mass email to ACE respondents
All Agencies (Local, State, Federal)
South County Task Force
South Region Healthcare Agencies
Water Agencies
South Region Superintendents & School Leadership
South Region Community Leadership Team
Chamber of Commerce
Border Health Collaborative
K-12 Schools

Cities: Imperial Beach, San Diego, Coronado, & Chula Vista
Legislative & Elected Groups
Healthy San Diego
APCD's IBC Steering Committee
Impacted Community Based Organizations
Coastal Commission



# Hot Spot Mitigation

- Visibly foamy area near Saturn Boulevard, with increased levels of hydrogen sulfide, likely due to turbidity
- Fall 2024 – mitigation by City of SD in conjunction with Navy after County initiated discussions
- June 2025 - Restarted urgent discussions with City of SD, Navy, and IBWC due to ongoing foam and increased detections; collaboration to actively pursue potential mitigation options



# Closing

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- **Focus on the Root Cause while supporting the Health of the Community**


- Significant Funding has been acquired to fix sewage infrastructure
- On May 20, 2025, USIBWC and EPA announced the acceleration of the expansion of the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant from 25 to 35 million gallons per day.
  - Originally planned to take 2 years, the upgrade was completed in 100 days (August 28, 2025)


IBWC 100day Plan



# Website

SanDiegoCounty.gov Home


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## Tijuana River Valley & Beach Water Sewage Crisis Public Health Response

Page originally published 2/16/2024. Last updated 6/25/2025.


The County of San Diego cares for South Region residents and what they are experiencing around health and quality of life issues. This website provides information and resources on the health concerns and impacts from sewage and pollution in the Tijuana River Valley and surrounding communities.




**What the County is Doing**




**Public Health Data**




**CDC Health Survey (CASPER)**




**ATSDR Exposures Survey (ACE)**






**ATSDR Public Health Assessment**




**Environmental Dashboard**

 **About Environmental Odors**

 **About Contaminated Water**


 

**LIVE WELL SAN DIEGO**




**Accredited Health Department**  
**PHAB**  
Advancing Public Health Performance  
Public Health Accreditation Board


### COUNTYNEWSCENTER



County Camp for Teens Shaping Tomorrow's Public Health Leaders



VIDEO: Seniors Find Safety and Security at Santa Fe Senior Village



Local Senior Finds a Happy Home

[More Stories](#)

## [Tijuana River Valley & Beach Water Sewage Crisis Public Health Response](#)





# THANK YOU

For more information, contact the Health & Human Services Agency at  
[phs.southregionhealth.hhsa@sdcounty.ca.gov](mailto:phs.southregionhealth.hhsa@sdcounty.ca.gov)

[SANDIEGOCOUNTY.GOV/SOUTHREGIONHEALTH](https://sandiegocounty.gov/southregionhealth)



*The Public Health Services department, County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, has maintained national public health accreditation, since May 17, 2016, and was re-accredited by the Public Health Accreditation Board on August 21, 2023.*