

**CALIFORNIA REGIONAL WATER QUALITY CONTROL BOARD**  
**SAN DIEGO REGION**  
**EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT**  
**September 13, 2023**

**ITEM 8**

**SUBJECT**

Update on the status of the United States International Boundary and Water Commission South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant. (*Dave Gibson*)

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

Information item only, no recommendation.

**KEY ISSUES**

The South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (ITP), operated by the United States International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC), has needed significant rehabilitation and repairs since at least 2020. Since 2020, however, inflows to the ITP from the collection system in Tijuana, Mexico have regularly exceeded the treatment plant's capacity, interfering with necessary preventative maintenance, and accelerating deterioration of the aging primary treatment system equipment.

The San Diego Water Board adopted Cease and Desist Order R9-2021-0107 (CDO) to require USIWC to address shortcomings inadequacies, and maintenance issues regarding control measures at the ITP needed to maintain consistent compliance with the requirements of the 2021 NPDES Permit as issued and amended by the San Diego Board in March 2023.

**PRACTICAL VISION**

Consistent with our Practical Vision Chapter on stewardship and transparency<sup>1</sup>. This item seeks to increase the transparency with the status of operations and rehabilitation of the ITP and impacts associated with Tropical Cyclone Hilary.

**DISCUSSION**

Planned rehabilitation work to comply with the CDO was about to start as tropical cyclone Hilary approached the region. The storm flows damaged the ITP at a time when it was already compromised by aging equipment and failed influent controls and primary treatment system pumps and motors. During the storm, the ITP received flows that exceeded the design capacity (25 mgd) by 100% (50 mgd) for 6 hours and 220% (80mgd) for 6 hours. The flow equalization basins were filled within the first hour of the storm. The high inflow and infiltration rates in the collection system in Tijuana resulted in damage throughout the ITP and at the Hollister Ave. Pump Station due to the excessive flows, sedimentation, and influx of debris in the wastewater that overwhelmed the screening in the treatment plant and canyon collectors. At the height of the storm, IBWC bypassed secondary treatment and discharged approximately 30 million gallons directly to the South Bay Ocean Outfall as an emergency measure to prevent further damage and overflow of the ITP to the Tijuana River.

Flows in the Tijuana River flood control channel exceeded 10,000 cfs during the storm on August 20, 2023, and more than 2.3 billion gallons have flowed through the flood control

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<sup>1</sup> The San Diego Water Board's Practical Vision is available at:  
[https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water\\_issues/programs/practical\\_vision/](https://www.waterboards.ca.gov/sandiego/water_issues/programs/practical_vision/)

channel since August 19, 2023. were from the Tijuana River main channel, and approximately 30 million gallons of untreated sewage was discharged from the South Bay Ocean Outfall.

The San Diego Water Board will receive an update from IBWC Commissioner Maria-Elena Giner and BWC staff regarding the status of operations and rehabilitation of the ITP, impacts associated with tropical cyclone Hilary, and the plans for emergency repairs to bring the ITP back into compliance with the NPDES Permit.

#### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

A Meeting Notice and Agenda for the August 2023 Board meeting was posted on the San Diego Water Board's website on August 28, 2023.

#### **SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS**

None