

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) will Evaluate Potential Health Risks in the Tijuana River Valley

San Diego County, CA



Horseback riding and hiking are popular activities on parkland trails within in the Tijuana River Valley in San Diego County, CA.

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ATSDR will evaluate whether exposures to chemicals in the Tijuana Valley could harm the health of community members.

- ATSDR will analyze environmental data collected by government agencies and researchers to evaluate past, current, and future chemical exposures.
- We plan to review air, surface water, sediment, soil, fish tissue, and odor complaint data.
- ATSDR's mandate is specific to health risks from chemical exposures. We are not able to evaluate bacteria or other biological contaminants in our assessment.



Goat Canyon is one of several canyons in the Tijuana River Valley. Water flows through these canyons during wet weather and when there are spills or overflow from wastewater collection systems.

Photo credit: © RightCowLeftCoast, 20 Apr 2018. License: CC-BY-SA-4.0; https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Goat_Canyon_Sediment_Basin.jpg

ATSDR will identify information gaps and uncertainties where we don't have enough data to determine health risks.

- In those cases, we may suggest collecting additional environmental data.

ATSDR will make recommendations to agencies, community members, and others to prevent and minimize harmful exposures.

- Findings from the public health assessment will be released in two reports on ATSDR's website.
- The first report will focus on potential exposures to contaminants in air. The second report will address other potential exposure pathways, like surface water, sediment, soil, and fish tissue.



U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services
Agency for Toxic Substances
and Disease Registry

ATSDR does not collect individual health information from residents during the public health assessment process.

- Instead, we estimate exposures to chemicals, assess health risks, and recommend ways to reduce or stop exposures to protect people's health.
- We will use health information and community concerns from Tijuana River Valley health surveys that CDC and ATSDR conducted with San Diego County in 2024.

ATSDR is committed to ongoing communication and information sharing with the community and other organizations.

- We want you to know about our public health assessment process, findings, and recommendations. Sign up to receive email updates by contacting Ben Gerhardstein (bgerhardstein@cdc.gov) in the ATSDR Region 9 office.

About ATSDR

ATSDR is a non-regulatory federal public health agency of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. ATSDR works with other agencies and tribal, state, and local governments to investigate possible health risks in communities where people could come in contact with dangerous chemicals. For more information about ATSDR, visit our website at <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/>.

Where to get more information

Contact ATSDR Region 9 with questions about the public health assessment:

- Ben Gerhardstein, Environmental Health Scientist, bgerhardstein@cdc.gov
- Jamie Rayman, Regional Director, jrayman@cdc.gov

About the Tijuana River Valley

The Tijuana River is an intermittent river, about 120 miles long, near the Pacific coast of northern Baja California state, in northwestern Mexico, and southern California in the United States. The river flows through the city of Tijuana, Mexico, across the international border, through a National Marine Estuary Reserve and other parklands on the southern edge of the city of San Diego, CA, and drains into the Pacific Ocean near Imperial Beach, San Diego County.

Community members in south San Diego County are concerned about health risks related to chemicals and sewage in the Tijuana River Valley. Hydrogen sulfide (i.e., sewer gas) from the river contributes to strong odors in neighborhoods, parks, and on beaches.

Other CDC/ATSDR activities

CDC Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response (CASPER) Survey

https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/south-region-health-concerns/casper-study.html

ATSDR Assessment of Chemical Exposures Survey

https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/south-region-health-concerns/ACE.html



Located in an arid area, the Tijuana River is intermittent. The river experiences higher water flow volumes during the wet season.

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