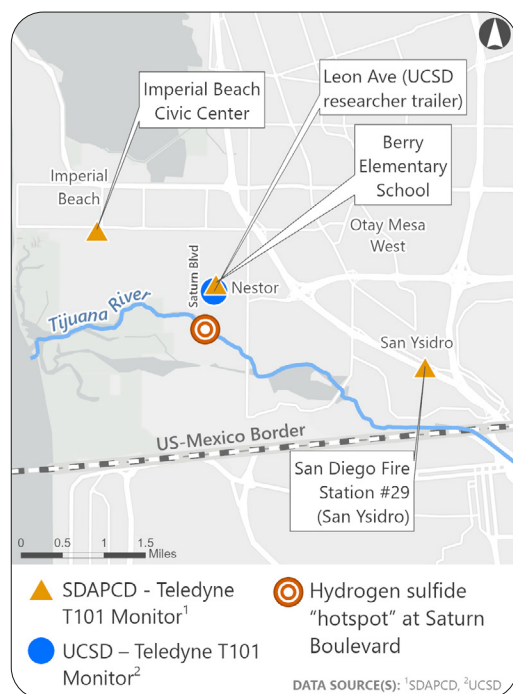


Health Evaluation of Hydrogen Sulfide in Outdoor Air in the Tijuana River Valley

SAN DIEGO COUNTY, CA | SEPTEMBER 2026



Summary of ATSDR's Health Consultation Report

For decades, untreated wastewater has flowed from Tijuana, Mexico across the U.S. border and into the Tijuana River Valley and Pacific Ocean. This wastewater contains **hydrogen sulfide**, which has a foul, rotten-egg odor and causes air quality and odor issues in nearby communities.

The California congressional delegation asked ATSDR to investigate how wastewater contamination could affect communities near the Tijuana River Valley. ATSDR reviewed outdoor air data collected between September 1, 2024 and May 5, 2025, from four monitoring sites. The San Diego County Air Pollution Control District (SDAPCD) and the University of California San Diego (UCSD) provided the data.

ATSDR assessed whether hydrogen sulfide in outdoor air in the Tijuana River Valley could harm people's health. This fact sheet describes ATSDR's findings.

The Bottom Line

1. Environmental odors in the Tijuana River Valley can negatively affect people's health and well-being. People may experience odor-related health symptoms such as headaches, nausea, stress or annoyance, nasal congestion, eye, nose, and throat irritation, hoarseness and sore throat, cough, chest tightness, and shortness of breath.
2. Hydrogen sulfide in outdoor air at the Leon Avenue monitoring site, and likely the Berry Elementary monitoring site, has reached a level for short periods of time that could harm people's health. Exposure to hydrogen sulfide at this level is a public health hazard. Health effects may include headaches, dryness of the nose and throat, and possibly difficulty breathing in sensitive people.
3. Longer-term hydrogen sulfide exposures (14 days or more) at the four monitoring locations are not expected to pose a public health hazard or result in additional health effects beyond those linked to short-term elevated exposures; however, they may still be associated with odor-related symptoms.
4. ATSDR cannot conclude whether breathing hydrogen sulfide in outdoor air in the Tijuana River Valley before September 2024 could have harmed people's health. ATSDR cannot draw a conclusion with the limited data collected before this time.



Find more details in ATSDR's full report [here](#).

What does ATSDR recommend?

Federal and State Agencies

- Take steps to prevent transboundary flows so that hydrogen sulfide levels remain as low as possible, ideally below levels that people can smell.
- Improve and maintain wastewater treatment systems.
- Collaborate with local agencies to reduce hydrogen sulfide at the “hot spot” where the Tijuana River flows under Saturn Boulevard.

Local Agencies

- Continue to monitor hydrogen sulfide air levels and communicate them to the public.
- Maintain signage through the Tijuana River Valley.
- Continue to offer air purifiers and filters to residents in affected areas.
- Collaborate with state and federal agencies to address the Tijuana River/Saturn Boulevard hot spot.
- Continue to collect and monitor odor complaints with a focus on identifying more hot spots.
- Consider expanding air monitoring to other locations and chemicals.
- Make sure any interventions protect people’s health.
- Maintain the [Community Hydrogen Sulfide Guidance](#).¹
- Consider working with state and federal agencies to help outdoor workers who cannot leave the area during their shifts.



Schools in the Tijuana River Valley

- Use [SDAPCD's website](#) to monitor levels of hydrogen sulfide in the air.¹
- Use [San Diego County's Resources for Schools](#) to make decisions about students' outdoor activities.²

Community Members

- Monitor levels of hydrogen sulfide in air through SDAPCD's website.
- Keep windows and doors closed when odors outside are bad, or leave the area if you can when hydrogen sulfide levels are high.
- Limit outdoor activities when odors are bad.
- Consider using air purifiers in your home. Eligible residents can sign up to get an air purifier through SDAPCD's [Air Improvement Relief Effort Program](#).³
- [Submit odor complaints](#) to SDAPCD.⁴
- Speak with your doctor if you are concerned about your or your children's health. Take this fact sheet with you.

Next steps

This report is about harmful chemicals in the air in the Tijuana River Valley. ATSDR plans to release a second report about chemicals in the surface water, sediment, and soil. ATSDR will ask for public comments for this report and will host a public meeting about it.

Where to get more information

Contact ATSDR Region 9 with questions about the report. You can find contact information by

- Searching the [ATSDR Regional Office Directory](#).⁵
- Calling 800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636).

About ATSDR

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

¹Hydrogen Sulfide Air Monitoring and Community Guidance: <https://www.sdapcd.org/content/sdapcd/about/tj-river-valley/tjrv-air-quality-monitoring.html>

²Resources for Schools: https://www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/hhsa/programs/phs/community_epidemiology/south-region-health-concerns/schools.html

³Air Improvement Relief Effort Program: <https://www.sdapcd.org/content/sdapcd/about/tj-river-valley/aire.html>

⁴Air Quality Concerns: <https://www.sdapcd.org/content/sdapcd/compliance/air-quality-complaints.html>

⁵ATSDR Regional Office Directory: <https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/regional-offices/index.html>