BACKGROUND

For decades, untreated sewage reached the Tijuana River, which flows north from Mexico to San Diego. The river transported the sewage to the coast at Imperial Beach, California, creating a nuisance and public health risk in the United States.

To address the problem, the International Boundary and Water Commission in 1990 developed an agreement, Minute No. 283, "Conceptual Plan for the International Solution to the Border Sanitation Problem in San Diego, California/Tijuana, Baja California." This agreement provided the framework for a project to treat wastewater from Tijuana, Mexico at a plant located in the United States.

Construction began in 1994. The South Bay plant became fully operational in 1999, providing advanced primary treatment for 25 million gallons of sewage a day and discharging the treated water to the Pacific Ocean through an ocean outfall.

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY AND WATER COMMISSION

In 1889, the U.S. and Mexican governments signed a convention agreeing to establish the International Boundary Commission. Under the Water Treaty of 1944, the Commission was reconstituted and designated the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC). The IBWC is responsible for applying the boundary and water treaties between the United States and Mexico.

The IBWC consists of a U.S. Section and a Mexican Section. The USIBWC receives policy guidance from the U.S. State Department.

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SOUTH BAY INTERNATIONAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

San Diego, California

South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant (left of center), Tijuana River (lower left) and Mexico (top)

INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
AND
WATER COMMISSION

United States Section

THE SOUTH BAY INTERNATIONAL WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT

TIMELINE

1983 Joint U.S.-Mexico wastewater treatment plant proposed.

1990 The United States and Mexico approve Minute No. 283, agreeing to construct an international wastewater treatment plant in San Diego.

1994 Groundbreaking ceremony with Vice President Al Gore as featured speaker.

1997 Minute No. 296, relating to distribution of construction, operation, and maintenance costs for the plant, is agreed to by the U.S. and Mexico.

1997 Advanced primary plant opens with discharge through an emergency connection to the City of San Diego Point Loma treatment facility.

1999 Plant begins discharging through the South Bay Ocean Outfall.

MINUTE NO. 283

Approved by the United States and Mexico in 1990, Minute No. 283 provides for the following:

- Design and construction of an international wastewater treatment plant in San Diego to provide treatment of sewage from Tijuana. Mexico to contribute to the funding of the plant in the U.S. instead of building a plant in Tijuana.
- Construction of sewage collection systems in Tijuana at Mexico's expense.
- Mexico to dispose of solids in Mexico.
- Construction of an ocean outfall by the United States to convey the treated wastewater offshore.

ADVANCED PRIMARY PLANT

LOCATION: At the international border on Dairy Mart Road in San Diego.

PURPOSE: To provide treatment of wastewater from Tijuana to reduce the flow of raw sewage into the United States.

View of plant facilities looking to the west.

FACILITIES: The South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant has a headworks area where the raw sewage is screened to remove floating debris and then degritted. The sewage then goes to the primary sedimentation tanks where chemicals are added. The chemicals react with the wastewater so that solids settle out faster. Once the solids have been removed, the treated wastewater, or effluent, goes to a chlorination facility for disinfection prior to discharge through the outfall. The solids or sludge are then removed from the sedimentation tanks and placed in temporary storage tanks. The sludge is taken to a processing building where it is dewatered and lime is added to kill bacteria prior to transport to Mexico.

SOUTH BAY OCEAN OUTFALL

LOCATION: Connects to the Land Outfall near the Border Field State Park and extends 3.5 miles offshore.

PURPOSE: To convey offshore the effluent from the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant and from the City of San Diego South Bay Reclamation Plant.

FACILITIES: The South Bay Ocean Outfall has a tunnel 11 feet in diameter buried 200 feet under the ocean floor. The effluent travels from underneath the shore, down a drop shaft, through the tunnel, and then to a riser that conveys the effluent up to the ocean where it is discharged through a diffuser. The ocean outfall has won prestigious engineering awards from the American Academy of Environmental Engineers and the American Society of Civil Engineers.

OCEAN MONITORING PROGRAM

The USIBWC routinely monitors the plant's impact on water quality according to the following schedule:

- 11 shore stations sampled at least weekly
- 3 kelp bed stations sampled 5 times per month
- 40 offshore stations monitored monthly

For monitoring results, go to the USIBWC web page at www.ibwc.state.gov.