

Clean Water and the U.S. -Mexico Border



Water is the border's scarcest, most precious, and most fragile resource, and protecting our water resources are of utmost importance to the U.S.-Mexico border region. Both countries have recognized the importance of having and keeping the water supply free from pollutants such as pollution generated in industrial zones, agricultural runoff, and wastes emitted by borderland boomtowns that have enlarged the situation. From the maquila-polluted New and Tijuana Rivers, to the shallow wells of southern New Mexico, to the Colonias that rely on the Rio Grande for their drinking water, substandard water quality continues to be one of the border's most pressing problems.



The U.S. and Mexico have recognized a need to create a bi-national environmental effort to come to grips with the increasing pollution of the Rio Grande River. The effort became known as "[Border XXI Water Workgroup](#)". In 1996 the water workgroup planned for the following initiatives:

- To develop, rehabilitate, and educate the infrastructure as to drinking water, waste-water management and waste-water treatment
- To develop and implement pre-treatment programs
- To establish bi-national watershed management and priorities, and create a key mapping system to locate trans-boundary surface and groundwater basins
- To expand programs monitoring the quality of ground and surface waters
- To develop personnel training programs related to water management issues
- To develop consciousness' about water and promote its efficient use
- To encourage public participation in water infrastructure decision making processes.

Due to the commitment of the "Border XXI Water Workgroup," the Tijuana wastewater treatment facility was upgraded to meet the demands of increased population and industrialization.

Remember, in the past Tijuana River was being exploited with raw sewage being dumped into the water leading to the Pacific Ocean. Even with this upgrade, the contamination continued leading to a decision to build an international wastewater treatment plant on the U.S. side of the border, named "[South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant](#)." The plant was completed in 1997. Due to the continued influx of industry and population growth in Tijuana which is one of the fastest growing and most

industrialized cities along the U.S.-Mexico border—a second wastewater treatment facility is needed to provide clean drinking water to the residents of Tijuana and surrounding area.

For over 5 years, the [International Boundary and Water Commission](#) (IBWC) and United States Environmental Protection Agency ([US EPA](#)) have been unable to decide what type of secondary-level wastewater treatment facility should be constructed in the Tijuana River Valley in the United States. Controversy over issues from cost, (capping at 239 million dollars to be spent on the secondary wastewater treatment plant) to what type of treatment would be considered safe, (such as treatment ponds) to plan ole bureaucratic red tape. "It's time to finish this job and look toward the future," said Felicia Marcus, the EPA's regional administrator. "All of us have a lot of work to do to address border sewage treatment needs."

Tijuana is one of many cities along the U.S.-Mexico border in need of wastewater treatment plants. This story is one example of why progress is delayed and pestilence advances. Our bi-national governments must take off the blinders and come to a realization to conquering polluted wastewater issues will bring about a chain effect-clean water, less disease-healthier people.

Those reading this article, get involved and voice your opinion or questions concerning clean water for all to drink or any other topic involving the U.S.-Mexico border. Here at "Border Voices", we welcome your input and will try our best to answer your questions with part two of "Clean Water and the U.S.-Mexico Border" next weeks article.

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