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## News Flash

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Office of Public  
Affairs

# USIBWC CLEAN-UP NEAR SOUTH BAY PLANT NETS MORE THAN 1,100 TONS OF TRASH

When storms drenched Southern California in January, they left behind a layer of trash strewn across a grassy plain near the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant.

The flooded Tijuana River dumped tons of paper, plastic, and wood on property owned by the U.S. Section of the International Boundary and Water Commission (USIBWC) at a sod farm and along the north levee from Dairy Mart Road to the lined river channel.

Agency concern, coupled with public outcry over the huge, unsightly mess, prompted USIBWC Commissioner Dr. Maria-Elena Giner, P.E., to act. She assembled a team to conduct one of the largest clean-up operations in our organization's history.

"Our mission is to protect the health and welfare of communities along the U.S.-Mexico border, so we knew we had to respond," Commissioner Giner said. "Fortunately, USIBWC's skilled employees are used to acting quickly and working together to accomplish the mission. They proved once again they are dedicated and caring public servants."

Led by USIBWC's Lower Rio Grande AOM Juan Uribe, the 2-month clean-up was completed by an in-house team comprised of 13 employees from the Upper Rio Grande, San Diego, and Lower Rio Grande Field Offices.



*The USIBWC clean-up crew (left to right) - Javier Cardenas, Esteban Olivas, Ricardo Luera, Juan Uribe, Joseph Tritz, Jim Houwman, Danny Garcia, Marco Limon, Jose Ibarra, Raul Gonzalez. (Not in the photo: Arnold Hernandez, Marco Gonzalez, and Gustavo Sepulveda.)*

As a result of their hard work, 1,103 tons of trash were collected. That's equivalent to the weight of about 150 African male elephants or 25 Boeing 737-800's!

And it should be mentioned this project was accomplished while repairs to the South Bay plant were ongoing.

Staging of equipment at the plant began in early March, after budget was allocated, the team assembled, and heavy equipment deployed to the region from El Paso and Mercedes, Texas.

Despite two tractors, a bulldozer, and a skid steer being on the scene and ready to go, crews had to wait until the ground was dry enough to support the heavy equipment.

Equipment Operators from the Lower Rio Grande Field Office began work on March 26, piling up the debris in preparation for removal.



*Before and after pictures of the clean-up area.*

A representative of San Diego City Councilmember Vivian Moreno sent an email to AOM Rogers telling him the lawmaker “is definitely appreciative of all that your team was able to do. As we move forward into a post-flooding San Ysidro, we are also thankful to the IBWC for choosing to keep their equipment in San Diego, should another flooding event occur. Thank you.”

Soon, the City of Imperial Beach Public Works Department loaned some of its equipment.

In April, the USIBWC awarded a contract for containers to haul the trash away.

The clean-up would eventually require 142 debris boxes, each with a capacity of 40 cubic yards.

As employees scraped the field to a nearly pristine condition, San Diego Field Office AOM Morgan Rogers sent out regular updates to stakeholders, which were amplified on USIBWC social media. The press also covered the event, with one reporter asking AOM Rogers if crews had encountered anything unusual on the site.

“Nothing significant, mostly paper, plastic, wood waste. One dead dog,” he said.

AOM Uribe, who was also on site, sent regular video updates, which were popular on the USIBWC X site.

Victory was declared on May 22, when the agency announced the final totals.

It didn’t take long for the public to notice.



*Commissioner Giner and Operations Chief Isela Canava visit the USIBWC clean-up crew.*

For his part, AOM Rogers had nothing but praise for the superb team effort.

“Thanks for the support on the clean-up, can’t say enough about Juan Uribe and his crew, they did a great job,” AOM Rogers wrote in an after-action email.

A “final update” video created by AOM Uribe can be found on the USIBWC X site:

<https://twitter.com/usibwc/status/179399034326155710>