

THE CITY OF SAN DIEGO



DAVID ALVAREZ

COUNCILMEMBER
EIGHTH DISTRICT

October 12, 2017

Dr. Stephen Weisberg

Executive Director

Southern California Coastal Water Research Project

3535 Harbor Blvd., Suite 110

Costa Mesa, CA 92626

RE: Testing for Hepatitis A in Urban Waterways

Dear Dr. Weisberg,

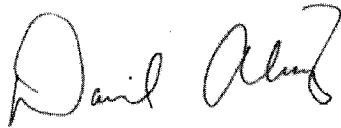
The Hepatitis A outbreak continues to impact San Diegans throughout the City. It is critical that all steps are taken to prevent the further spread of this dangerous pathogen. That is why I recently sent a letter (attached) to various public agencies requesting that an effort be made to sanitize urban waterways within the City. In a letter from the EPA (attached) regarding this topic, it is stated that the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP) was unaware of any effort to monitor surface water for any hepatitis viruses. Given the current public health emergency related to Hepatitis A it is critical that we take all precautions possible to stop its spread and ensure that conditions do not worsen by allowing the virus to contaminate our urban waterways, beaches and bays. A recent study by the City and County (San Diego Bacteria TMDL Cost-Benefit Analysis – Draft Report) as well as a co-report titled Surfer Health Study, observed that the presence of human waste in local waterways is a source of harmful bacteria and viruses that flow into the ocean. Monitoring surface waters in our urban waterways for the Hepatitis A virus is a common sense action to take to protect against more people becoming infected.

I would request that the SCCWRP undertake surface water monitoring efforts in our urban waterways which are impacted by homeless encampments that are likely a source of fecal contamination into the waters, and at our beaches and bays in order to ascertain whether the virus exists in places like the San Diego Bay, Mission Bay, the San Diego River, Chollas Creek, Nestor

Creek, and our beaches. If monitoring shows the presence of the Hepatitis A virus in these locations, an action plan should be explored to determine how best to prevent the spread of the virus into other areas, such as the coastline.

Thank you for your prompt action on this time sensitive matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Alvarez". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a stylized "A".

David Alvarez

San Diego City Councilmember, District 8



CITY OF SAN DIEGO

September 14, 2017

Mayor Kevin Faulconer
County of San Diego
Army Corps of Engineers
United States Fish and Wildlife Service
California Department of Fish and Wildlife
Regional Water Quality Control Board

To Whom It May Concern:

The deadly spread of Hepatitis A can only be fully addressed when the Federal, State, County and City of San Diego agencies work together to share resources and responsibility to halt the spread of the disease. Recently, sanitization efforts have begun in downtown San Diego, however, the San Diego Riverbed and Valley and other urban waterways in the City, such as Chollas Creek and Nestor Creek, need to be sanitized with the same vigor.

With an estimated 20% of San Diego's homeless population residing along the San Diego River, we are asking for your immediate support to include the San Diego Riverbed and Valley into the ongoing Hepatitis A cleanup and for it to become a multi-jurisdiction and multi-agency effort. As part of a coordinated response to address this public health emergency, staff should be directed to breakdown illegal encampments and relocate inhabitants to appropriate shelters where they can access restrooms and handwashing facilities.

The San Diego Riverbed and Valley is an environmentally sensitive habitat for native animals and plants. It is extremely worrisome that the amount of trash, debris and human feces still exist in this sensitive area. A recent draft study by the City and County (*San Diego Bacteria TMDL Cost-Benefit Analysis – Draft Report*) as well as co-report titled *Surfer Health Study*, observed that the presence of human waste in local waterways is a source of harmful bacteria and viruses that flow into the ocean and found that "targeting human waste sources of bacteria is the most cost-effective strategy to improve public health and increase recreational opportunities following rain events." Addressing the presence of human feces in the San Diego River Valley should be a top priority.

In addition to the continued spread of Hepatitis A, the potential dangers of ongoing encampments along the San Diego River include contamination due to the presence of human

feces at the mouth of the river, harm to sensitive species and habitat, continued build-up of trash, increased fire risk, increased risk to public safety personnel and volunteers and damage to the Mission Valley Preserve.

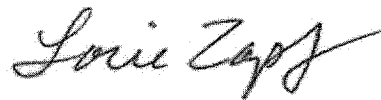
We fear that this epidemic will continue to spread through the water to the mouth of the river and into the ocean. We cannot afford to delay taking immediate steps to address the spread of Hepatitis A into the San Diego River Valley. Now is the time to act before this becomes an even more widespread health emergency.

We ask for your collaboration and cooperation in expediting this cleanup operation.

Sincerely,



David Alvarez
Councilmember
Chair, Committee on the Environment



Lorie Zapf
Councilmember
District 2

CC: Representative Scott Peters
Representative Susan Davis
Senator Toni Atkins
Assemblymember Todd Gloria
Assemblymember Shirley Weber



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street

San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

The Honorable Scott Peters
U.S. House of Representatives
2410 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressman Peters:

Thank you for your letter of September 18, 2017 regarding the hepatitis A outbreak in San Diego County. You asked if local waterways are contributing to the spread of the hepatitis A virus. I reached out to the Southern California Coastal Water Research Project (SCCWRP), which has a superb understanding of water-quality monitoring underway in San Diego. They affirm that no one we know of is presently monitoring surface water for any hepatitis viruses. Food, as the major route of hepatitis disease transmission, is monitored. SCCWRP has offered to adapt the food-measurement approach to a future water-quality monitoring protocol, if the Regional Water Quality Control Board, County and/or City would find that to be helpful.

In my discussions with David Gibson, Executive Officer of the San Diego Regional Water Quality Control Board, it is clear municipal efforts must be broadened to reduce the many different sources of human fecal matter from homeless individual and group encampments in roadside rights-of-way, storm drains, beach parking lots, and river bottoms. People living in recreational vehicles can also be a source of illegal human waste dumping, lacking access to low-cost pump-out options. These sources of human fecal matter are confirmed in water-quality data submitted to the Regional Water Quality Control Boards along the Southern California coast. For many years, we've supported the Water Boards in their development and adoption of stormwater permits, and the implementation thereof by local governments.

Through this and other mechanisms, we can provide technical support to the State, County and City, although solving this problem through a stormwater-only approach would not suffice. Together with the State, County and City agencies, we endorse the practical advice already given to remove trash, debris and human feces from urban areas, where it could enter storm drains and be carried to creeks, bays and coastal waters. While we have no public health expertise in addressing the optimal approaches to controlling the disease outbreak, given our mission and staffing, we stand ready and willing to assist the State, County and City as needed. I look forward to talking further with you in person on October 30th at the San Diego Industrial Environmental Association conference. If you would like to discuss how we may best support San Diego at this critical time, please call me at (415) 972-3572 or refer staff to our Congressional Liaison, Brent Maier, at (415) 947-4256.

Sincerely yours,

Alexis Strauss 6 October 2017
Alexis Strauss
Acting Regional Administrator

cc: D. Gibson, San Diego RWQCB
K. Schiff, SCCWRP