



CALEXICO NEW RIVER COMMITTEE

P.O. Box 2374 Calexico, CA 92231 PH. (760) 357-8389 Fax (760) 357-8779
E-mail: info@calexiconewriver.com Web: www.CalexicoNewRiver.org

****SB 387 FACT SHEET –TALKING POINTS****

Please Support SB 387 (Ducheny) to Clean Up the New River and Protect Human Health and the Environment

On behalf of the Calexico New River Committee, and other community-based organizations, we ask for your support on SB 387 (Ducheny), which has passed the State Senate and will be heard in the Assembly Water, Parks and Wildlife Committee in Mid June. The Calexico New River Committee was established in 2001 and is dedicated to eliminating the negative human and environmental health impact of the New River in Calexico and the rest of the Imperial County.

The purpose of SB 387 is very straightforward: **to create authorization in state law to help fund a comprehensive project within California to protect human health and the environment in Calexico and surrounding areas, and to set the stage for more comprehensive bi-national remediation efforts in the future.**

SB 387 is the next logical step in an effort that spans over 50 years of work to clean up the New River as it flows through the City of Calexico. Often referred to as the **“most polluted river in North America,”** the New River originates near Mexicali, Mexico, and flows north into the United States through the City of Calexico and regions of the Imperial County, California before discharging into the Salton Sea.

Flows in the Calexico New River carry urban runoff, untreated and partially treated municipal sewage, untreated and partially treated industrial waste, and agricultural runoff. Although caused by a complex international situation, primarily the citizens of Calexico and the undocumented workers attempting to cross into the United States by floating or swimming in the river experience the impact of the New River pollution. **The public threat to these individuals and those living in the areas is unacceptable.**

The New River water has been found to contain bacteria and viruses known to cause human disease including **streptococcus, tuberculosis, encephalitis, arbovirus, polio, cholera, hepatitis, and typhoid.** New River pollution also stifles economic development in the Calexico area. The area along the river has a noxious odor and is undeveloped. It is likely to remain undeveloped until a solution is found.

The California Regional Water Quality Control Board (CRWQCB) and the Imperial County Health Department have identified the New River as a public health hazard. A report by US EPA (*February 20, 1998) evaluating New River pollution stated, **“The New River poses a potential public health hazard because area residents could be exposed to fecal streptococci, and other pathogens through contact with contaminated surface water and foam.”** The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (*February 28, 1996) reports, **“ingestion and dermal exposure to New River water poses a threat to public health.”**

Efforts to address the problem of New River pollution have been underway for decades, but have been frustrated by a number of factors:

- Mexico has encased the New River for five miles immediately south of the international border, to protect its citizens from exposure, and has instituted and continues to plan for and make improvements to its

sewage collection and wastewater treatment systems, but its success has been limited by a lack of funding, the need to address higher priorities, and by explosive population and industrial growth within Mexicali.

- Mexico has been protective of its sovereignty, and at times has turned down offers of United States backed grants of low interest loans to build expanded sewage collection and wastewater treatment facilities within Mexico.
- The State of California legislature has not authorized funding for the New River projects within the United States, stating that it is an international problem, and, therefore, negotiating a solution is the responsibility of the United States federal government

The purpose of SB 387 is to create authorization in state law to help fund the Calexico New River Improvements Project, a comprehensive project within California to protect human health and the environment; funding is being sought at the same time through federal authorization. This project includes:

- The installation of an automatic bar screen (to remove trash) at the border.
- Cleaning of the river bottom and of the contaminated soil.
- Construction of 3½ miles of a double box culvert, adjacent to the current channel, to contain the rerouted New River where it flows through the developed area of Calexico (including overflow provisions).
- Construction of a wastewater polishing system at the end of the box culverts to provide treatment of residual pollution.
- Creation of an open space for recreational facilities such as walking/running trails and a soccer/baseball field in the area along the existing channel.
- Improvement of New River habitat, such as restored native vegetation and artificial treatment wetlands.
- In addition to including all of the items and features identified above, an optional phase 2 would assist in ensuring that discharges of wastes from Mexico do not violate U.S. EPA approved Pathogen Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL) for the New River, and would include diversion and disinfection facilities.

SB 387 creates unambiguous authority to deal with a very specific legal concern: is the New River really a “river” or is it actually an open-air sewer? Regardless of whether it is a river or a sewer, we need to treat it as an urgent and long-neglected human health problem and address it by providing for a comprehensive remediation effort within California, including its encasement, which is the way we treat all sewage flows in California through urban areas. The specific features included in the Calexico New River Improvements Project have been identified and designed to meet a number of objectives:

- Providing immediate public health and environmental improvements in a manner that is compatible with longer-term pollution control and environmental improvements for the Calexico New River and Salton Sea.
- Preventing access to the Calexico New River in the immediate Calexico area, thereby eliminating direct human contact with the river.
- Providing an enhanced environment for community and economic development activities.
- Phasing project development so that those features that can be quickly permitted move ahead independently of those features that will require a more lengthy review process.
- Identifying project features that can be developed locally, without the need for international negotiations.

We look forward to working with all concerned stakeholders – and the State of California – to finally solve this vexing pollution problem in the Imperial County.

For More Information Contact:

Pablo Orozco
Executive Director, CNRC