



The San Diego Union-Tribune

\$3.00 | SUNDAY, JANUARY 25, 2026 | SANDIEGOUNIONTRIBUNE.COM



The Tijuana River and its streams contain untreated or partially treated wastewater, stormwater runoff and industrial discharge from Mexico, contributing to coastal pollution, beach closures and degraded habitat north of the border. **NELVIN C. CEPEDA / U-T**

\$1.1M pilot program fails to cleanse Tijuana River

Nanobubble technology showed promise reducing bacteria, but it struggled with trash

By Walker Armstrong
UNION-TRIBUNE

The federal government awarded a \$1.1 million contract to an Ohio company to conduct a pilot project deploying a technology to kill bacteria and eliminate odors in the sewage-tainted Tijuana River. It failed, in large part because the company had never used the technology in an environment with such a large amount of solid waste pollution and with unpredictable changes in water flow.

The company, Greenwater Services, uses a nanobubble

ozone technology primarily to attack harmful algae blooms in slow-moving or still water, such as lakes and ponds. The project at the international border showed the company's equipment was ill-prepared for the conditions that plague the region.

The Tijuana River has faced severe water quality challenges for years as untreated or partially treated wastewater, stormwater runoff and industrial discharge cross the border from Mexico, contributing to coastal pollution, beach closures and degraded habitat. The chronic contam-

ination has created significant public health, environmental and economic impacts for communities in San Diego County and officials at all levels of government have sought ways to mitigate the crisis.

The U.S. International Boundary and Water Commission, which oversaw the project, said in its contract award that it did not put it out to bid because of "the urgent need to assess the effectiveness of this technology in addressing the public health threat posed by airborne contaminants in the Tijuana River flows. Given the

unique capabilities of Greenwater Services' technology and the immediate need for a solution, it is in the public interest to proceed with this pilot program to validate the technology's performance."

IBWC Commissioner Chad McIntosh declined to answer questions about the pilot program, nanobubble ozone technology or its implementation at the Tijuana River.

Al George, CEO of Greenwater Services, said the company approached San Diego officials

See SEWAGE on Page A8

San Diego's progress on homelessness may help in fight for scarce funds

By Kelly Davis
UNION-TRIBUNE

Gov. Gavin Newsom warned recently that cities and counties could lose state funds targeted at addressing homelessness if they don't show real progress in getting people off the streets.

In San Diego, local officials say they're finally starting to see that progress.

The Regional Task Force on Homelessness reported a roughly 7% drop in homelessness county-wide in last year's point-in-time count, from about 10,605 people in 2024 to about 9,905 in 2025.

In the city of San Diego, homelessness — sheltered and unsheltered — dropped by 14%.

In his recent State of the City address, Mayor Todd Gloria pointed

to the reduction as proof that the city's approach to homelessness is working.

That progress puts the San Diego region in a relatively strong position as the state tightens the rules around Homeless Housing, Assistance and Prevention funding, known as HHAP — one of the largest sources of state money for homelessness programs — and as other funding sources shrivel.

HHAP was launched in 2019 as a one-time infusion of state cash to help cities and counties respond to the growing homelessness crisis. Over several years, it became one of California's key homelessness programs, delivering roughly \$1 billion a year statewide for shelters, outreach, rental assistance and

See HOMELESS on Page A6



Jake Stout wipes snow from his face during a storm Saturday in Nashville, Tenn. **GEORGE WALKER IV / AP**

NATION & WORLD

Deep freeze grips large swath of United States

A massive storm sweeping the nation, bringing snow, ice and sub-zero temperatures, prompted emergency declarations in nearly two dozen states and caused the cancellation of roughly 13,000 flights through the weekend. Today's more than 9,200 cancellations are the most for any single day since the coronavirus pandemic. A3

See 48TH DISTRICT on Page A10

DIGITAL ACTIVATION

Your U-T print subscription gives you access to our local coverage and comes with special benefits available once you activate your digital accounts online. Scan this code or see A11 for more details.



U-T INDEX

Crossword	F2	Markets	C5	Television	E11
Dear Abby	F3	Obituaries	B3	Travel	E9
Editorial	B7	Opinion	B6	Weather	A11



HENRIK IBSEN'S

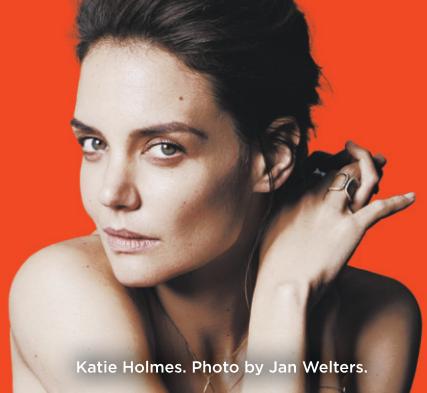
HEDDA GABLER

IN A NEW VERSION BY ERIN CRESSIDA WILSON
DIRECTED BY BARRY EDELSTEIN

KATIE HOLMES STARS IN THIS
TIMELESS MASTERPIECE ABOUT
MARRIAGE, PASSION, AND POWER

EXTENDED BY POPULAR DEMAND! ONE WEEK ADDED
FEBRUARY 7 – MARCH 15

(619) 234-5623 • TheOldGlobe.org



Katie Holmes. Photo by Jan Welters.

THE OLD GLOBE

See how our work lives beyond the stage • TheOldGlobe.org/Beyond

A PATH FORWARD STEVEN P. DINKIN

Toward a brighter future: Nurturing civility in the workplace

To ensure a better future, business has an obligation to "nurture workplace civility to facilitate discussions about contentious issues." It's a belief shared by 80% of people, according to the most recent Edelman Trust Barometer.

Now in its 25th year, the Trust Barometer surveys adults in 28 developed and emerging countries. The data collected is representative of the general population across age, gender, region and ethnicity. The title of the newest report — "Trust and the Crisis of Grievance" — conveys just how sour global sentiment has become. The reason, Edelman concludes, is that "institutional failures have pushed us to the brink."

Across the globe, we worry about job security due to factors like trade conflicts (62%), economic pressures (63%) and automation (58%). We believe government and business leaders "purposely mislead people" (69% and 68%, respectively). And we are convinced the wealthy don't pay their fair share of taxes (67%), attributing many problems to

their selfishness (65%).

I, too, believe that business has an obligation to nurture workplace civility and rebuild optimism about the future of our country. People don't come together in community as much as they once did, exalting the role of the workplace in creating a more civil society.

While civility is an admirable end-state, it relies on a person's ability to communicate effectively, especially in highly charged times. Facilitating discussions without equipping people to have challenging conversations (and even embrace them!) won't achieve the desired outcome.

It's the premise behind "Communicate to De-escalate," a training program developed by the National Conflict Resolution Center. Since its launch last year, NCRC has delivered this workshop at companies and organizations of all sizes, around the country. This year, we will be working with national employers like the YMCA wanting to help their teams navigate tense

situations and conversations with colleagues and customers.

They describe every day at the YMCA as a "frenzy." Community members are easily triggered. Staff need critical communication skills to defuse these interactions quickly and respectfully, before they boil over.

It's logical to think of de-escalation as a tool for a crisis, but the data tell a different story. According to CPP Global (publisher of the Myers-Briggs Assessment), the average worker loses 2.8 hours every week to interpersonal friction. De-escalation isn't a "break glass in case of emergency" skill — it's a tool for reclaiming 7% of our productive lives.

If you find yourself in an escalated situation, here are three tips for navigating it:

1. Understand anger. An angry person often feels like they've been treated unfairly. The problem is you, not them: You should have known better and behaved differently. It's all your fault. If you're on the receiving end of this anger, you may find your-

self getting escalated, too. Take a break and breathe; think and then respond. Most importantly, remember the other person's humanity.

2. Summon your "learning brain." Dr. Shirzad Chamine, a neuroscientist, talks about "positive intelligence" as a way to achieve emotional regulation. Mostly, he says, we rely on our "survivor brain," which activates the fight or flight response; is characterized by fear, aggression, and uncontrolled emotions; and relies on easy biases and stereotypes.

The underused "learning brain" centers us in challenging situations; evokes self-observation; and brings out empathy for others. It helps you to see yourself in a different role, as the person who connects (rather than retaliates) and restores harmony. It will disarm your "foe" — I guarantee it.

3. Visualize a tree. The top of the tree is what a person says when they are frustrated about something. It's most often manifested in the form of complaints or sarcasm. But the roots are

what really matter — the underlying needs that are important to a person and affect their behavior. You can only see the roots if you listen and acknowledge their emotions; the feeling of validation — and being heard — is calming.

The Edelman survey corroborates what we at NCRC have known for a long time. Civility in the workplace isn't just a "nice-to-have" — it's an expectation. When we equip our teams to summon their "learning brain" — and navigate conflict with empathy and respect — we can transform the workplace into a sanctuary of constructive dialogue and deep conversation.

We will be well on our way toward building a better future.

Steven P. Dinkin is president of the National Conflict Resolution Center (NCRC), a San Diego-based organization that is working to create innovative solutions to challenging issues, including intolerance and incivility. To learn about NCRC's programming, visit ncrconline.com.

FLOOD

From Page 1

thing, the braver thing," said Ramirez's other daughter, Cristal, of her sister's efforts.

Residents in southeastern San Diego say the community was connected before the floods. But the community has come together to support one another in new ways over the last two years.

Shelltown resident Beba Zarate hosts craft nights in her home, where neighbors can come together to paint or crochet and share how they're feeling. She and another flood survivor also hold a weekly bagel distribution in Southcrest for any families that need it, flood victims or otherwise.

Local nonprofits, like the Harvey Family Foundation — which helped residents rebuild nearly 80 homes — have supported the recovery efforts as well.

A group called Shelltown Resilience, of which Zarate and Cruz are members, has also emerged in the wake of the floods, hosting park cleanups and toy distributions. Its goal is to serve as a voice to help shape what the rebuilt community looks like.

"We organize ourselves to help the community," Zarate said. "If we do not stand and advocate for our community, who is going to do it?"

The city has a decades-long backlog of storm channel infrastructure maintenance and an outdated stormwater system that city officials warned before the 2024 floods could lead to catastrophic flooding. It has a nearly \$4 billion deficit to



Water flows down Chollas Creek near National Avenue after the creek flooded on Jan. 22, 2024. **NELVIN C. CEPEDA / U-T FILE**

address stormwater infrastructure needs.

In the last two years, the city has performed more regular maintenance on channel segments impacted by the 2024 floods, but recent city records show that nearly half of its channel segments and infrastructure haven't been maintained in at least 15 years.

Following the 2024 floods, the city's stormwater department says it cleared roughly 18 miles of channels — including 12 miles of channels in the Chollas Creek watershed.

And the city has stormwater capital improvement projects in the works, including one on Beta Street in Southcrest that recently received \$1 million in federal funding — part of \$4 million the city



Carlos Ramirez and his daughter, Cristal, talk about how high the water was outside their home on Yama Street during the flood two years ago. **NELVIN C. CEPEDA / U-T**

got from the federal government for critical stormwater infrastructure projects. Other capital improvement projects are sorely underfunded.

But residents are demanding more accountability. The lawsuits against the city and other public entities say they failed to maintain the

storm channels, leading to the flooding. The city has in turn filed more than 20 cross-complaints, including against at least two flood victims, maintaining that they were responsible for drainage on their properties or took steps that could have increased storm runoff.

A trial date is set for October.

Some residents say they hope to use any money they receive from the litigation to pay off debt incurred from reconstructing their homes or buying back items they lost in the floods.

Shelltown resident Daniella Avila was eight months pregnant when the waters flooded the home she shares with her mother, father

and brother. She lost all the gifts she received at her baby shower and relied on donations from friends and family to resupply before her daughter was born the next month.

For the Ramirez family, the cost to fix their entire property was estimated to be around \$250,000. Nonprofits stepped in to help with the rebuild, though the family handled much of the early recovery themselves, including mold remediation and removing the mud from their home in the days after the flood.

Windows still need to be replaced, and a bathroom is still under construction. But the home is now about 90% complete — "little by little," Ramirez said.

COUNT

From Page 1

outry, but it highlights the funding uncertainty now surrounding these critical lifeline resources."

"Our organization works with all varieties of populations who are at risk of experiencing homelessness," Anglea said. "This last year we have seen low-income families ... often with disabled heads of

household, as well as seniors and others living on fixed incomes, hit the hardest."

For several hours Thursday morning, when the unsheltered are easiest to locate, teams of volunteers will walk or drive in their assigned census tract areas to identify homeless individuals or households and ask them questions, a Regional Task Force official said.

Each team is led by a professional outreach worker or a

seasoned volunteer.

"Homeless people who participate in the questionnaires are given a pair of socks, a \$10 7-Eleven gift card and a pamphlet with information on services in their area," said Gary Warth, a former reporter at The San Diego Union-Tribune who is now the director of government relations, policy and communications for the Regional Task Force.

A sportswear company,

Bombas, provided 5,000 pairs of new socks for the event.

"Volunteers in the count are trained through an online course," Warth said last Thursday. "Coordinators for each deployment site receive in-person training at (the task force) headquarters in mid-January."

The final count includes people temporarily in shelters, where data is collected by the service providers running the shelters, and people living on the street, often in cars, tents or on sidewalks, who are counted by the volunteers. The Regional Task Force also works with Home Start, the YMCA, San Diego Youth Services and South Bay Community Services to collect data on young people not seen elsewhere.

"As of yesterday afternoon, we had 1,313 volunteers signed up and need another 150 more to meet the quotas," Warth said. "This includes 265 outreach workers and 394 county staff."

The U.S. Department of

Housing and Urban Development requires the count to be conducted every two years, although the San Diego task force does it annually.

Data from the count is used along with other information in a formula that helps to determine funding for local homeless services.

"The count has evolved over the years from a simple head count to also including questionnaires that include demographic information," Warth said.

The volunteers ask people where they were living when they became homeless. The question is not required by HUD, but is done locally to address the assumption that many people who already are homeless move to San Diego.

"Data collected over the years show that more than 80 percent of people who are homeless were living in San Diego when they became homeless," Warth said.

Last year's count showed a 7% drop in homelessness across the region, according to the task force. Families without shelter were down by 72% from 2024, and homeless veterans decreased by 25%.

"That was a step in the right direction and shows the targeted investments and partnerships between organizations like ours and our

policymakers are making a difference," said Bohannan at Father Joe's.

"But our work is far from done," Bohannan said. "Federal and state cuts threaten to undo the gains our region has made. Additionally, we recognize that the rate of seniors experiencing homelessness has risen. As the cost of housing and living rises further out of reach for San Diegans, seniors remain especially vulnerable."

One in three people who experience unsheltered homelessness in the region are 55 or older, and half of them are experiencing homelessness for the first time, according to the task force.

Individual cities with reductions from 2024 to 2025, including sheltered and unsheltered homelessness, were: San Diego, down 14%; Carlsbad, down 15%; Encinitas, down 12%; Oceanside, down 9%; La Mesa, down 9%; and Chula Vista, down 6%.

Overall, the 2025 count found no less than 9,905 people experiencing homelessness throughout the county, down from 10,605 a year earlier, according to the task force. The 2025 number includes 5,714 unsheltered San Diego County residents and 4,191 individuals in shelters and transitional housing.

The 2025 decline came after three years of steady increases. There was no point-in-time count in 2021, when it would have taken place at the outset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Regional homeless numbers hit a peak in 2017 and declined in 2018, 2019 and 2020, according to statistics from the task force.



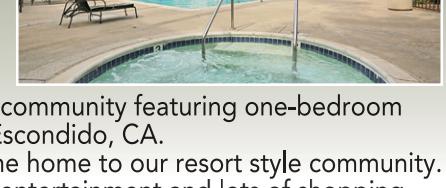
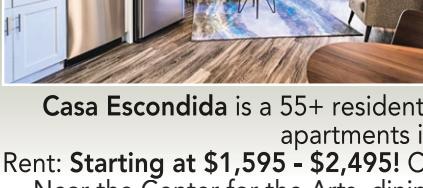
CASA ESCONDIDA SENIOR LIVING COMMUNITY

The Lifestyle You Deserve

Feel at home in our resort-style community

MOVE-IN SPECIAL

Same Day Look & Lease: One Month Free + Spin to Win for Additional Concessions.



Casa Escondida is a 55+ residential community featuring one-bedroom apartments in Escondido, CA.

Rent: Starting at \$1,595 - \$2,495! Come home to our resort style community.

Near the Center for the Arts, dining, entertainment and lots of shopping.

One Bedroom Resort-Style Apartment Homes for Senior Living 55+ featuring a pedestrian-friendly neighborhood.

\$1,595 - \$2,495

Scan the QR code or visit our website

to view floor plans and amenities

CasaEscondidaSeniorApts.com

715 North Broadway | Escondido, CA 92025 | 760.746.4474



Dignified Scatterings at Sea

at Oceanside Harbor

Since 1982

Sea Star CHARTERS

CA State Lic. CRD565 | Affordable Rates

(760) 966-0111 | SeaStarBurials.com