

Minutes of the Air Quality Task Force Meeting

Mexicali / Imperial

May 12th, 2016

Co-chairs: Reyes Romero; Saul Guzman

Attendance:

Reyes Romero, Imperial Valley Air Pollution Control District; **Raul Tovar**, Environmental Protection Secretariat; **Dave Fege**, U.S. EPA, San Diego Border Office; **Mariana Miranda**, SEMARNAT on behalf of **Alfonso Blancafort Camarena**; **Rebecca Corella**, English and French translator; **Efrain Nieblas**, Environmental researcher at the Engineering Institute in UABC; **Ramón Gonzalez**, Todos Somos Mexicali, A.C.; **Fabio de la Cruz**, Mexicali Technological Institute; **Jose Alfonso Acosta**, Colectivo Sierra Cucapá; **José Landeros**, CARB monitoring stations technician in Mexicali; **Fernando Amador**, California Air Resources Board; **Michael Schorr**, Engineering Institute at UABC; **Claudia Cristerna**, La Voz de la Frontera Newspaper; **Ray Askins**, environmentalist; **Nayeli Treviño**, SPA; **Belen Leon**, Air Pollution Control District; **Meozotiz Torres**, DPA; .

I. Welcome and Initial Comments

Reyes Romero welcomed everyone. He said he hoped this meeting would be productive and that it would meet everyone's expectations for this task force. **Raul Tovar** said on behalf of the Environmental Protection Secretariat he wanted to thank everyone for being there and mentioned he was in charge of the air quality monitoring network,

II. Revision of Minutes from Prior Meeting

Reyes Romero said he hoped everyone had had a chance to review the minutes from the prior meeting and if so, he indicated now was the time to make comments or suggestions regarding the minutes. Since there were no comments, suggestions or requests, the minutes were approved at that time.

III. Presentations/ Questions and Answers

Updates on Projects in Mexicali; Mariana Miranda, on behalf of Alfonso Blancafort- SEMARNAT

Ray Askins pointed that only two action plans were mentioned, and that in his opinion there are a ton of pollution problems in Mexicali. He asked why their action plan wasn't more aggressive and why there wasn't any enforcement to protect public health.

Mariana Miranda said she did not have enough information to be able to answer his question because it was a very complex question, which involved public policy as well as decisions made not only at a state level, but at a central one. Therefore, she said she did not have an answer for him.

Ray Askins asked why SEMARNAT was not doing what they have to in order to enforce norms and regulations to protect public health. He said that every time he raises the question, he's told they're working on it, and that is not an answer.

Reyes Romero said that without trying to be cynical, that is the answer. They are working on it.

Ray Askins said that was pathetic.

An attendee asked if managing funds for Pro Aire was SPA's responsibility or if it was managed from central offices.

Mariana Miranda said it was managed from central offices.

IV. Border 2020 Projects and Updates; Dave Fege

Dave Fege announced that he was attending his last meeting since he was going to be retiring in a couple weeks. He also mentioned that the person who was going to replace him was **Jeremy Bower**, who had already been in place at their Bureau Office for a little over a year and has 5 or 6 years of experience at EPA headquarters. He said he would be the EPA representative for this task force, and also has responsibilities for EPA for coordinating border air quality management not only here, but also in the Arizona/Sonora border. He mentioned they had had a continual grant with Imperial County Air Pollution Control District, which expired in March. He said the district already had permission to expand funds for a grant that will go for about 7 years. He explained that this grant funds the expenditures for this meeting, which is held about 5 times a year including translation services, as well as drinks and snacks. He mentioned that it also covers the outreach campaign in Mexicali and Imperial counties during the holiday season to encourage the reduction of open burning and the use of fireworks as well as a couple projects such as the outreach information at the digital billboard at a Mall, and posting or reporting of air quality information on the cable T.V. locally. He explained that their funding comes year to year so even though it is a 7 year grant, the only funding they can commit by their rules is for the first year. However, he mentioned he could not see those funds not being available at some level after he leaves. Finally, he mentioned there are 2 PM 2.5 monitors that had been installed in Mexicali under a grant with EPA, and they were up and running.

Reyes Romero asked **Fernando Amador** to please give the group an update on the monitor status.

Fernando Amador said he had presented a Mexicali PM 2.5 project that they were going to start this year. He mentioned the project had already started and that it had been running for about 3 weeks now. He mentioned there are 4 new monitors at UABC, 2 BAM PM 2.5, 1 monitor for 2.5 speciation, which is analyzed in Sacramento, a URG black carbon monitor, and a BAM PM 2.5 at COBACH. He said all of them are running and that there is real time data available at the Air Now website, and that if anybody wanted the link, he could send it to Belen for her to send out. He also mentioned that it was his understanding that SPA was also posting the data on their website for PM 2.5. He added that the project would go on for two years so the project would end in April, 2018. By that time, he said they hoped to do a study to help them find out the sources for PM in the city of Mexicali.

Reyes Romero mentioned there was interest in the Mexicali community not only to have access to data from the air quality monitors, but also to have this data translated into terms that would allow the public what they mean in terms of health issues.

Dave Fege asked if they were asking for the information from the Imperial Valley website in Spanish or if it was more than that.

Reyes Romero explained that what they were asking for was a similar page for Mexicali.

Dave Fege mentioned that SPA has a website that is very similar to the one in Imperial Valley. He explained it is color coded the same for the AQI (Air Quality Index) information. He also said that for the Imperial County website they have funding for CARB (California Air Resources Board). He explained that with these funds they are going to develop an app for smart phones, and they are going to have alerts and forecasts in both English and Spanish.

Raul Tovar pointed out that at the SPA website they have 2 online stations from Mexicali and 2 online stations from Tijuana. However, he also pointed out that more than 3 steps are needed in order to access the information. Therefore, they had already hired a team to remodel the page and that they will be able to access this information easily with fewer clicks. He also mentioned that it was just a matter of time for them to have more stations online.

Michael Schor said he wanted to propose for this task force to organize a series of informative bilingual presentations in order to educate and create awareness in the community on the importance of air quality for human health.

Reyes Romero suggested publishing the SEMARNAT website as part of the November media campaign so that people in Mexicali may have direct access to the information since that is what they have been asking for.

Michael Schorr insisted on the importance on reaching out to people on-site.

Raul Tovar mentioned that during *Expo Ambiente* (an environmental expo) a couple years ago, a stand was put up with equipment from the stations and a map to locate them, as well as the link to access the information on their website. He also mentioned that these kinds of activities help spread information and create awareness on the importance of air quality.

An Attendee mentioned with regards to the possibility of people having access to the air quality information in Mexicali through the internet or an app on their cell phone, a few years ago it had been pointed out to them that this was not possible due to a contract in place with the company who is in charge of managing this system, and that they had to look into this contract an update it so that this would be possible. He said that now that the monitoring network was being updated they had to consider getting additional funds in order to develop these kinds of applications.

Ray Askins said that in order to encourage people to participate on changing the environment, the website should inform that trees and shrubs are available through SPA; all you have to do is sign up. He said that if this gets out to the public, trees will be picked up.

Raúl Tovar said that indeed, any person, school, or agency may ask for trees and other plants from the nurseries just by filling out a request form.

Fernando Amador asked if it is possible for Baja to get a grant or funding to write an app for their real time monitoring.

Dave Fege said he would like to ask Efraín if the contractor that he was talking about was a Mexican contractor or a U.S. contractor.

Efraín Nieblas explained it was an American contractor who had a contract with the EPA, but that unfortunately he did not recall the name.

Dave Fege said it was STI and that it would be pretty easy for them to write the app because it is the same app that they do for other communities. He explained it was difficult for them to get funding to SPA, but that it was easy for them by their rules, to get funding to CARB. Therefore if there were some agreement and bi-national cooperation between SPA, CARB and EPA that could happen the next fiscal year. He explained that they would want to make sure that the monitors are continuously reporting because otherwise, we would get false reports because when they are not reporting, it shows good quality so having this app would be a good incentive to make sure the monitors are reporting. He added that the SPA website is not only for the Mexicali monitors, but it also includes Tecate, Tijuana and Rosarito monitors.

Reyes Romero said they would be working on that. He explained it would not be that difficult because CARB is already managing that grant for Imperial County and it would just be a matter of finding a way to extend it to Baja.

Fernando Amador said it would be a very similar app so just a few adjustments would make it work for the Baja stations.

Raúl Tovar mentioned that the problem they had was that the information sent to SONOMA was sent through SINAICA (Air quality information national system, from its English initials), Mexico, which delayed its delivery. He said they currently already have motors and servers at the Tijuana Laboratory, which allows them to pull the information directly to be sent to SONOMA.

Fernando Amador said he would talk to his people in CARB to see into extending that grant to include an application for Baja.

Reyes Romero said it would be a good idea for this group to write a proposal to help **Fernando Amador** convince his people that this app would be really helpful so he could ask for a bigger grant.

Dave Fege said that the fact that the data no longer goes to SINAICA is really helpful because that was a big delay on it getting to SONOMA. He also mentioned that he did not see a problem on getting that grant. However he said they would have to make sure that they would be getting consistent reporting of the data to make sure they get accurate information out. He also said that his vision would be to eventually have only one website for the entire Mexicali/Imperial air shed that would report on all of the monitors at one time.

Fernando Amador said he had suggested having at least on the Imperial County website, a link to the Mexicali webpage. He added this would be something that could be done sooner and easier.

Dave Fege agreed with him and added that San Diego could actually do that at this time for Tijuana as well.

V. Updates from Federal, State and Local Governments

Reyes Romero said they were working on 3 State Implementation Plans. One for comply with the PM 2.5 standards, one for PM 10, and one for ozone in the Imperial Valley. He said these 3 plans had to be developed and completed by the end of the year, which was a very ambitious goal, but they were going to do their best to accomplish it. He explained that these plans were very similar to the Pro Aires in México, with the difference being that a Pro Aire is a master plan for all the pollutants, and in their case, a plan for each pollutant is made. He also mentioned that they had observed that in the case of PM 10 all the exceedances were due to wind impact and not by transport from Mexicali like it was shown back in 2009. He said this plan would be ready by the end of the year. However, he mentioned that in the case of PM 2.5 they were observing a significant impact due to transport from Mexicali

especially during the winter season when thermal inversions occur. He explained they were working together with the state to develop this plan. The plan for Pm 10, as well as the one for ozone is being developed in collaboration with a private consultant agency. He said that in the case of ozone, they had observed that the biggest producers of nitrogen oxide are automobiles, which is difficult sector to regulate in order to reduce emissions of this pollutant. He also mentioned that the violations of the ozone standards are due to a critical transport of ozone from the Los Angeles area. He finished saying that by the beginning of next year, he hoped to be able to do a presentation for the group about the results from these plans.

Raúl Tovar said with regards to pending projects that they would be receiving the missing equipment needed to be installed in the air quality network monitoring stations.

Ray Askins mentioned that people in Mexicali are getting sick due to the pollution in the air shed that both countries share. He said this makes you wonder why governments on both sides of the border have not been more active and more aggressive in trying to eliminate all this pollution, he said both governments are guilty. He said that installing those 40 monitors allows them to identify where these hazards are at and they should be doing a lot more about this.

An attendee said to agree with his comment. However, he said that even though this is the government's responsibility. It does not have a magic wand to make everything right. He said it would be a good idea to invite other organizations to participate and find a way to involve public and private institutions on this matter. He also mentioned how important it is to spread the information to create awareness and for this purpose, he said it was necessary to invite representatives from the educational sector.

Reyes Romero mentioned that even though it may seem like they have not accomplish much in all these years, it was not so. He said that a good example of the advances made was the fact that the city of Mexicali has managed to reduce its PM 10 emissions just like he had mentioned it earlier when he talked about the State Implementation Plans. He said this did not mean they had eliminated the problem completely, but it sure was an advance.

VI. Wrap Up/ Date of Next meeting

Reyes Romero said the next meeting would be held in Calexico, and that they were proposing September 8th. He said he hoped to see everyone there He also mentioned that this was **Dave Fege's** last meeting due to his retirement. He said that this group is what it is thanks to his effort throughout all the years that he has been a part of it. He presented him with a plaque from the Imperial/Mexicali Air Quality Task Force to show appreciation for all his hard work and support, as well as his leadership, commitment and outstanding participation.

Dave Fege thanked everyone for the plaque and said that EPA, as well as SPA and SEMARNAT support and will continue supporting the efforts this group makes to improve air quality in this region.

Reyes Romero cordially invited everyone to have a slice of cheese cake to celebrate **Dave Fege**.

Meeting Adjourned.