

Minutes of the Air Quality Task Force Meeting

Mexicali / Imperial

September 8th, 2016

Calexico

Co-chairs: Reyes Romero; Saul Guzman

Attendance:

Reyes Romero, Imperial valley Air Pollution Control District; **Saul Guzman**, Secretariat of Environmental Protection in Baja California; **Jeremy Bower**, US EPA, San Diego Office; **Belen León**, Imperial valley Air Pollution Control District; **Nayeli Treviño**, SPA; **Raul Tovar**, SPA; **Fernando Amador**, California Air Resources Board; **Eduardo Martinez Palomera**, Board of Economical Development in Mexicali, Baja California; **Doctor Octavio Aguirre**, OBSERBC, Mexicali; **Gabriela Reyes**, OBSERBC; **Blanca Sanchez**, Baja California Citizen Observatory; **Meozotiz Torres**, SPA; **Hector Lares**, SPA, Mexicali; **Margarito Quintero**, Director of Planning and Environmental Policy, SPA; **Laura Sandoval**, Baja California Urbanization Board; **Fausto Espinoza**, Baja California Urbanization Board; **Alfonso Acosta**, Colectivo Sierra Cucapah, **José Landeros**, Imperial Valley citizen; **Ray Askins**, Environmentalist; **Claudia Cristerna**, La Voz de la Frontera News Paper; **Marco Antonio Reina**, Institute of Engineering at UABC

I. Welcome and Initial Comments

Reyes Romero welcomed everyone, especially **Eduardo Palomera** and **doctor Aguirre**, who were attending this meeting for the first time. He said that being eleven o'clock, they would begin the meeting. He thanked each of the attendees for taking time off their busy agendas to attend this meeting. He mentioned that **Eduardo Palomera** as well as **doctor Aguirre** brought with them the good news that through the groups they represent, there would be a greater collaboration with Air Quality Task Force. **Saul Guzman** added that he would like to insist on doing whatever it takes on both sides of the border to make sure that all parties interested on attending to these meetings would get the appropriate information so the attendance would be larger each time. He said the issues they are addressing are very important and there are many organizations interested on participating and giving support to this task force

II. Revision of Minutes from Prior Meeting

Reyes Romero said that he hoped everyone had had time to go over the minutes from the prior meeting and if they had any comments on the minutes, now would be the time to express them. **Saul Guzman** said he would like to point out that opposite to what was mentioned on the minutes as a comment from **Mariana Miranda** on behalf of **Alfonso Blancafort Camarena** from SEMARNAT, this Pro Aire 2011-2020 was not managed strictly from central offices, the state was given the privilege of participating and it was also stated for the local government to always be present. He also said that it was stipulated for the government to constitute the core committee and for the local government to constitute the secretariat. Once this clarification was made, **Reyes Romero** proceeded to approve the minutes from May 12th, 2016.

III. Presentation; questions and answers

Paving and Rehabilitation Program in Mexicali; Fausto Espinoza on behalf of Raúl Lopez, Director of the Urbanization Board in Mexicali

Reyes Romero asked if the Progreso neighborhood was already paved, and if it was not, he asked if it was going to be paved within this program. He said his concern was that this zone had been identified as one of the zones with a higher rate of PM 10.

Fausto Espinoza said it was paved on main roads only and mentioned that this program did not include the Progreso neighborhood because this program only included the west and northwest zones of the city.

Reyes Romero mentioned that regarding health issues, paving roads was very important in the city of Mexicali, mainly because it was considered to be one of the most polluted cities in the country. He also mentioned that before 2008, the city with the biggest pollution issues in the Imperial Valley was Calexico, and that this was in great part due to the transport of PM 10 from Mexicali towards the north. He said they were currently working on an implementation plan similar to Pro Aire and that their findings were that the PM 10 transport from Mexicali no longer exists, and that this was because of the paving done through different programs.

Saul Guzman asked if this program included having environmental indicators such as reduction contribution of PM 10 per square meter or per square kilometer paved.

Fausto Espinoza said they would try to add that data to the current paving program to have an idea on how much they are actually reducing PM 10.

Margarito Quintero mentioned that the PIPCA (Paving and Air Quality Comprehensive Program) was born during governor Elurdo's period and that it was based on information generated by the UABC Engineering Institute regarding air pollution and its health impact. He added that there was a study by **Engineer Campbell** related to what **Saul Guzman** was mentioning and that it would probably be useful.

Reyes Romero said that despite the fact that some people have asked what this task force has done as far as air quality and its impact on health, he wanted to point out that there had been improvements and that with the help from groups such as the UABC Engineering Institute, they have managed to promote interest from sectors that must be involved when it comes to air pollution.

Eduardo Martinez Palomera said he would like to highlight the importance of this task force as well as that of the Pro Aire in order to combine efforts from the Urbanization State Board, the State Government and the Federation because they are facing a health issue, not a funding issue. He said that task forces such as this one are a key to solving these issues because since they do not represent any private interest, and focus on solving health issues in the cities of Mexicali and Imperial through improving the air quality, they are the ones who can request funds for this purpose.

An Attendee asked if the stakeholders in this program from both the public and private sectors received any kind of training as far as adequate maintenance of the roads once they are paved to prevent their damage.

Fausto Espinoza explained that they have meetings on which brochures are handed out and talks on what they should NOT do in order to prevent their damage are given.

José Landeros asked if they have data which indicates what percentage of air pollution was caused by the lack of paving, and what percentage was caused by the industries both in Mexicali and Imperial Valley. He also asked if anything was being done about air pollution caused by the industries.

Saul Guzman said that as far as the state's responsibility goes, he would like to mention that 3 pollutant contributors have been identified ; one being the industrial activity, another one being area sources, and the last one being transportation. He mentioned that transportation in general contributes between 40 and 50% percent of pollutants and that as far as energy consumption; the transportation sector contributes with over 70% of the air pollutants in a low particulate matter proportion. However, he also mentioned that the area sources, which make up the largest part of the emissions inventory for pollutant sources, and are also zones without paving, agricultural zones, border crossing zones are the ones that contribute the most to pollutants in general. He said that the industrial sector has been often blamed for contributing in large proportions to pollutants in the air, when the reality is that this sector contributes in a very low proportion compared to area sources and mobile sources. He added that the state regulates the entire industrial sector, and that even though not all of them are in total compliance, most of them comply with the established regulations. Furthermore, he stated that the smog check program contributes in mitigating air pollution. He mentioned that there is a national almanac distributed by the Ecology and Climate Change National Institute, which during the period of 2000-2009 refers the city of Juarez as the most polluted as far as PM in Mexico. He also mentioned that SEMARNAT announced having another emissions inventory based on the year 2013, which gives a more updated picture. He informed that a state Pro Aire for Baja California was about to begin and that under this program, a new emissions inventory will be done for the state in general

Reyes Romero mentioned that when improvements are made as far as lowering emissions, it was because of binational collaboration. He said to keep in mind that both countries share the same air shed, and that what happens in one side of the border affects the other side and vice versa.

Ray Askins said he had noticed that something that the city of Mexicali was lacking regarding road paving was signs indicating the kind of vehicles allowed to transit the roads. He said these kinds of signs should be put up with specifications on weight in order to prevent damaging of the roads. He said he would like to see regulations being enforced to avoid having to pave roads over and over again.

Fausto Espinoza said that in order to do that coordination between all the agencies responsible for road paving was required. He mentioned that some roads have hydraulic concrete deceleration slabs to avoid damaging the pavement at the time of starting and breaking of the trucks.

IV. Border 2020 Projects and Updates; Jeremy Bowers, EPA

Jeremy Bowers said he did not have anything to share with the group at the moment.

V. Updates from Federal, State and Local Governments

Belen León said they had received a grant from EPA to continue with their media campaign for one more year. She said this campaign started in 2011, and that this year it would be implemented during the months of November, December, and January. She said it was an educational campaign to prevent burning of Wood, tires and fireworks during the holidays, and that it consisted of 5 commercials distributed on different radio stations and television networks, which are transmitted on both sides of the border. She mentioned the campaign was called *Ambientalízate*, and that they had chosen a young figure to appear on the commercials in order to call the attention of children and teenagers to create awareness on how harmful these practices are. Furthermore, she added that two new modalities

were added under the *Air Quality Index* Program, which is a program through which the air quality for the day is presented using different color coded flags. She explained that bad air quality is represented with a red flag, good air quality is represented with a green flag, and alerts are represented with yellow and orange flags. She mentioned that the first modality added to this program was the air quality index being shown on two digital signs at key points in the Imperial Valley. She mentioned this program is a part of *Air Now* and that you can have access to air quality alerts at their site in the internet: imperialvalleyair.org. She said the second modality to this program was to inform the community about air quality conditions through radio stations and television networks on news programs under the traffic report and weather forecast sections. She finished saying that the main purpose of this program was to inform and make people aware of the air quality in their region so that they can plan their daily activities accordingly.

An attendee asked if through this program, they could download a mobile application.

Belen León mentioned that a joint effort was being made with CARB to make this application available.

Reyes Romero said that in the Imperial Valley when they access their website on their mobile phone, they can get the information from all the monitoring stations so that depending on your location, you can take protective measures according to the air quality for that day.

Claudia Cristerna asked SPA if on the Mexican side they had a similar program and if not, if they have any plans to implement one in the near future.

Saul Guzman said they did not have a similar program, and that they were not planning to have one at the moment. He explained that their main priority for now is to get all monitoring stations working efficiently, and that their next priorities would be to link the measurement parameters between Mexicali and Imperial in order to have the same information and use that information efficiently to keep the public informed. He mentioned that *Pro Aire* will have early alerts and probably environmental emergency procedures but above all, the idea is to maintain the public informed on air quality at all times. He said that one of the projects they have in mind is replicating the color coded flags model from Imperial Valley especially in public buildings at a first stage, and that once they have enough information being uploaded online and this is accessible to the public, they could consider the possibility of having a mobile application.

Ray Askins asked if he could have a copy of the *Ambientalizate* commercials to post them on Face Book so that people concerned about the environment could see them. He mentioned that he has a monitor installed on his roof, and that starting on September 30th he would be publishing the data on a regular basis. He also said he had plans of installing two more monitors on the Mexican side since SPA did not seem interested on monitoring the west side of Mexicali, where *Su Carne* and the two power plants are located. He also said that the use of fireworks would be intensified during December when the change of government administration takes place, and that it was very important to contact the new administration in order to convince them not to use fireworks.

An Attendee mentioned that the program mentioned by Belen, in her opinion was very useful and also very interesting. She said she would like to know if after using those funds during a year, there was the possibility of continuing with the program.

Belen León she was hoping to be able to extend the program. She said that the alert part was definitely going to continue because it was a part of an EPA program in collaboration with CARB. She also said that the media campaign and the digital signs was the one funded for just one year.

Marco Antonio Reina asked if what was normally monitored in the Imperial Valley was PM 2.5 and ozone.

Reyes Romero said it all depended on each monitoring station. He mentioned that the two monitoring stations which monitor the largest amount of pollutants are the ones in Calexico and El Centro, and that this last one monitors all pollutants.

Marco Antonio Reina said that in his opinion, it was very important to monitor all criteria pollutants in Mexicali because up until 2006, what had been reported showed a decrease on carbon monoxide, but then during 2007 and 2008, a peak was observed. He mentioned that carbon monoxide, ozone, sulfur dioxide, among other pollutants were not being monitored in Mexicali and insisted on the importance of monitoring all pollutants to have an idea as far as the status of the air shed currently. Furthermore, with regards to the air quality alerts, he said it was important to have an emergency plan available to the public so that they know how to proceed if necessary. He added that they should start thinking of plan to leave obsolete and harmful technologies behind, and begin using cleaner technologies. He mentioned that in the U.S. they already have some charging stations for electric vehicles, and that Mexicali despite the pollution issues it is facing, it is very far from getting to that point. He also said that gas stoves are another significant pollution source in our homes, and that it is important to find a way to offer cheap credits in order to start adopting new and better technologies.

Ray Askins mentioned they should also consider having connection areas for idling vehicles. He said it was very important to make this service available for both trucks and buses at stations and places where they make stops for long periods of time and they have to be idling and polluting the air. He said it was a simple change that can be done, and it does not take a lot of money to do it. He said the same regarding vapor recoveries at gas stations; he said all gas stations should have them and use them. He said he knew it was something within the control area of the state.

Reyes Romero mentioned that continuing with the updates, they were still working on 3 implementation plans to meet the standards on PM 10, PM 2.5, and ozone. He said that unlike the Pro Aire Program in Mexico, on which a single plan is developed to meet the standards for all pollutants, in the U.S. a separate plan is developed for each pollutant. He said they were currently working on the implementation plan for PM 10. He mentioned that the prior plans had been based on the impacts from Mexicali towards Calexico, but that the new plan is based on the impact from the wind which transports PM 10 from the desert to the monitoring stations located in the north part. As far as the implementation plan for PM 2.5, he said they had observed there is a strong impact from PM 2.5 transport towards the north, especially during the holiday season. He said ozone affects mainly during the Summer and that they had observed a strong impact due to ozone transport from Mexicali towards the border. He mentioned that they hoped to have this implementation plan by the end of the year. He also mentioned with regards to the implementation plans for ozone and PM 2.5 that due to the circumstances observed on the air shed shared between Mexico and the U.S.; these will depend in a great measure on binational agreements in order to meet the standards.

An Attendee said this was the first time he was attending this meeting, and asked if the Board of Public Education was represented within this group. He said that schools play an important role in the environmental education task and public awareness on the impact that tire burning, use of fireworks, dumping of trash and other bad practices have on public health.

Reyes Romero said that what he mentioned was very important, and that as a binational group they had observed that one of the main issues they have to face when trying to implement an educational and awareness program for the community was not getting funds to do it, but rather finding someone to do it.

Margarito Quintero mentioned that within the Secretariat of Environmental Protection, there is an environmental education department which takes care of these topics. He also mentioned that there is an annual Environmental Fair for each municipality. Therefore, a group of people who work on those issues already exists in Mexico.

Belen León asked to receive further information about those environmental fairs.

An Attendee mentioned that the Environmental Protection Department in Mexicali has a school program since approximately 6 years ago. He explained that different schools are visited to promote environmental education through this program. He said that in the case of the U.S. being interested on supporting their work, it was just a matter of contacting them directly.

Reyes Romero said they had participated with them before helping them with their Forestation Guide, and that they could very likely join efforts once more to support educational programs in the different schools.

An Attendee said he would like to insist on the importance of having a representative from the Board of Public Education in this task force because otherwise they simply do not have any information or timely updates on this matter.

Eduardo Martinez Palomera mentioned that many efforts were done to improve the air quality in the region. However, he pointed out that they are done individually. He said because of this, the Board of Economic Development as well as the Baja California Citizen Observatory have asked the university dean to develop an air quality program based on the 40 actions contained in the Pro Aire, and to gather all interested parties, including this task force through the UABC Research Institute in order to share information to promote projects to improve air quality. He said it was important to assign responsibilities for each party involved as well as to set deadlines. He also added that in his opinion, U.S. and Mexico need a better coordination in order to improve together with more efficiency, more transparency, and in a more timely matter.

Claudia Cristerna mentioned that it was also important to invite the private sector to become involved and participate on promoting environmental health.

Saul Guzman said that in his experience, these kinds of programs do not succeed precisely because of lack of coordination between the stake holders. He said they all needed to make greater efforts to have all stake holders represented in this task force. He announced that the core committee for the Pro Aire Program had been installed again, and the challenge of this Pro Aire was to observe and report the status of the program in order to follow up on it. He also informed that the Climate Change Action State Program also needed to be followed up. He explained that this program has 2 elaborated phases; the first one refers to the general climate analysis, and the second one addresses a micro and macroeconomic evaluation. He also informed that they were already installing new equipment at the monitoring stations, and that he hoped to have most of the stations monitoring pollutants properly by the end of the year. He pointed out that just as collaboration between stake holders is important so is not to discredit any of the projects being done by any other sectors because that is how you lose public credibility. He finished announcing on behalf of secretary **Thelma Castañeda** that they had invited Doctor **Margarito Quintero** to participate as part of SPA on air quality issues, information analysis, and other issues related air quality and environmental impacts within the activities that the state regulates.

Reyes Romero said that it was important to go over the 40 actions contained in the Pro Aire in order to identify those on which they can collaborate binationally, and then establish an action plan to implement them.

Marco Antonio Reina said with regards to the lack of information due to the lack of efficient monitoring by some of the stations at some point that analysis on economic and public health impacts can be done with the current data. He also mentioned that it was important to have series of times on the different pollutants hour after hour in order to be able to have better resolution studies. He also added that it was very important to have a public health record on illnesses and mortality rates related to air pollution. He mentioned that Mexico does not have a regulation to make it mandatory for the health sector to have one. He finished pointing out the importance of not interrupting programs as important as the Pro Aire Program, and that it was urgent to find a way to continue these programs despite administration changes.

An Attendee said she was about to develop a project on PM 10 and PM 2.5 impacts on children with asthma in the Imperial Valley region.

An Attendee mentioned that he had done a similar study together with **Doctor Marco Antonio Reina** in the city of Mexicali, which was published in 2009. He said this study has served different purposes and that it showed that a healthy child can suffer up to a 20% of his pulmonary function due to air pollution, which means that a healthy child will behave as an asthmatic child during winter, while an asthmatic child will be permanently ill. Because of this, he said it was of great importance to have health authorities represented on this group.

An Attendee said with regards to state government updates, that they were working on surveillance operations in areas where the monitoring station is located.

Jeremy Bowers mentioned there would be a Symposium in Mexicali about environmental and health issues related to zika, and dengue as well as climate change impacts on September 27th. He said they could get more information about this on their website or they could ask him after this meeting.

Claudia Cristerna informed that there would be an Environmental Summit organized by Comite Civico del Valle in Brawley on October 22nd, and that she would be sending more information about it through **Belen León**.

VI. Wrap Up / Date of Next Meeting

Belen León informed that the date for the next meeting would be December 8th, and that the meeting would be held at UABC in Mexicali. **Reyes Romero** thanked everyone for attending this meeting, and said he hoped to see as many people at their next meeting in Mexicali.

Meeting adjourned.