

**Air Quality Task Force Meeting
Mexicali / Imperial
Mexicali, Baja California
February 6th, 2020**

Co-chairs: Belén León; Saúl Guzmán; Elizabeth Melgoza

I. Attendance:

Izadora Clark Ordoñez, Environment Protection Directorate; Lilian García, National Border Patrol Counsel; Margarito Quintero Interested in the topic of air quality; Oscar Romo, PERSIS; Raúl Tovar AQTF, Iván Martínez, RESPIRA; Alberto Mejía, RESPIRA; Patricia Torres, RESPIRA; Fernando Amador, CARB; Ryan Atencio, CARB; Juan Serrato, CESP from Mexicali; Marco Antonio Vargas, Agricultural Producer; Alicia Botello, Citizen Committee of Ecology and Environment of Mexicali; Osvaldo Leyva, UABC Faculty of Architecture and Design; Adriana Arias Vallejo, UABC Faculty of Architecture and Design; Alejandra Álvarez, OBSERBC; Daniel Yáñez, PROFEPA Industry Sub delegation; Laura Lawrence, EPA; Lizzy Melgoza, CARB; Reyes Romero, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District; Marlene Flores, Imperial County Transportation Commission; Meosotis Torres, Environment Protection Directorate; Luis Olmedo, Comité Cívico del Valle; Sandy Ian, American Consulate in Tijuana; Arturo Castro, Environmental Control Engineering; Rodolfo Castro, Environmental Control Engineering; Ray Askins, Environmentalist.

I. Welcome and Opening Remarks

The attendance is welcomed, everyone is reminded that they need to sign in to confirm their attendance and are reminded that they have a translation team.

I. Revision of Minutes from Prior Meeting

The previous minute is reviewed and there are no observations.

I. Presentations / Questions and Answers

Summary of Anti-Burning Program in Mexicali; Izadora Clark, Department of Environmental Audit and Regulation.

Margarito Quintero asked what kind of programs would be established to prevent agricultural burning.

Izadora Ordoñez said that as mentioned in the presentation they still do not have any elaborated program.

Marco Antonio Vargas commented that the problem is not going to be solved by giving machinery to producers which he believes will not be given to them as a gift. He mentioned that the situation of the producers is critical and they are not going to be able to acquire this machinery. He said that many producers are not interested in packing wheat straw because by burning it they kill a large amount of weed seed. He commented that there are more points in favor of integrating wheat straw into the land for its hardening due to the excessive use of fertilizers. He mentioned that another way is to pack straw which many are not interested in and that there are people who do not require machinery because they can buy packaged straw which he sells. He commented that the problem is the culture that many farmers have. He suggested another option which is to use straw for livestock feed.

Margarito Quintero comparing Mexicali and Ciudad Obregón, mentioned that Ciudad Obregón has more productivity in terms of cereal generation due to the degree of humidity that exists in that part of the country. He commented that this allows the eskimo to be reintegrated underground. He said that almost 80% of the land in Mexicali is rented and the landlords are not going to want to invest to that end and the state should take that detail into account.

Saúl Guzmán commented that the regulatory framework establishes that the national agricultural authority is the one who has competence in the matter and he mentions that this must be reconsidered at the state or municipal level to have a regulatory mechanism to be able to regulate burning. He commented that in 2013 and 2014 the producers made an effort not to burn more than 2000 hectares of field, the promise was that by 2014-2015 they would move forward not to burn more than 4000 hectares but that they had the support of FIRCO and UNAM made studies of the benefits of that work plan. He mentioned that there is already material to approach it in another way. He said that the project fell in 2014-2015 because FIRCO's support was withdrawn and the producers did not invest more because it was not affordable.

Rodolfo Castro mentioned that he is involved with a project of a company that produces emissions inventory. He commented that they investigated regarding agricultural burning and found that there are companies that are dedicated to lifting the eskimo and then take it to the coastal area and use it as livestock feed as mentioned by **Marco Antonio Vargas**. He mentioned that the Secretary of Agriculture could be at that work table to support the programs that they want to do.

Luis Olmedo mentioned that in the 20 years he has been fighting against agricultural burning, progress has been quite slow. He commented that the industry of the Imperial Valley is attached to the fact that there is no alternative and that the equipment and resources to advance on the Mexican side are lacking. He said he was in a discussion in a forum with members of the agricultural industry that sows and harvests in Mexicali and they said they wanted to get a permit, but they did not know where. He said this made him curious to know how many plots where the land is being rented to US farmers who don't know where to get a permit.

Juan Serrato commented that straw should be valued more as a by-product. He added that these crops should be planted in areas further away from Mexicali and not burned every year. He said that the use of the products must be seen. He said that synergistic problems have to be seen apart from the direct ones.

Lilian García mentioned that a letter was sent to all local, state and federal representatives that week to work to eliminate agricultural burning in the imperial county and said that she will give it to **Belén León** so that she can deliver it to government representatives. He commented that the two valleys affect each other.

Saúl Guzmán said that originally only three participations were scheduled, but the point needs more time. He mentioned that as a summary they could invite the agent of the secretariat of agriculture to be in that plan design so that they can expose it directly. He commented that the forest attributions that the secretary for environmental protection had went to the secretary of the field and food security.

Izadora Ordoñez commented that the priority is the recovery of the soils because this improves their profitability. She said that agricultural burning is already known to unbalance the soil microbiota. She mentioned that everyone should think about the primary intention to see how to contribute.

Utilization of the NOM-172-SEMARNAT-2019 Air-Health Index; Raúl Tovar, Air Secretary of Sustainable Economy and Tourism

An attendee asked if any government that has a government network, even low-cost monitors, would have to report this.

Raúl Tovar replied that according to the law, governments should comply with it.

Alberto Mejía commented that the low-cost network is out of the norm for the devices, but they have tried to follow the methodology to be as close as possible. He mentioned that the flag program will be aligned for Mexico on that methodology.

Laura Lawrence said that in the US the AQI is based on the regulatory standards and asked if there was a relation between the new index and standards in Mexico

Raúl Tovar said that it is basically the same, but they will use the last section that is what generates the index.

Saúl Guzmán commented that the Mexican part is based on a reference standard that contains a standard of contaminants harmful to health above a certain limit, which is the one that is taken as the basis to create the entire methodology. He mentioned that the corresponding authority is obliged to publish a health risk notice if they exceed the limit.

Ray Askins said he'd like a copy of the presentation. He commented that they should also be concerned about the schools that are exposed to the ag-burning. He mentioned that the monitor in UABC isn't published and that it should be. He said that on that morning the quality wasn't good at all throughout all of Mexicali and said that it's time to fix the issue instead of looking at statistics because nothing is being done.

Raúl Tovar mentioned that the station at UABC is published on the page of the state government. As for the schools, he said that the flag program contains information on this.

An attendee said that, seeing the difference between the indices between Mexico and the United States, if there has been an update for the contingency plan. He added that confusion could be generated between the two systems since one can say an index and the other could have another result.

Raúl Tovar commented that the contingency plan would have to change because it was based on a different value. About the discrepancies, he mentioned that the color codes would stay the same and that the only thing that would change would be the number.

Saúl Guzmán mentioned that they were part of the working group that created the norm and reviewed international norms. He commented that it is harmonized with all monitoring systems, but they will not always have the same numbers as the United States.

An attendee said he agrees with the binational communication because they depend on data from both sides. He said the words 'localized data' and 'designated location' have another meaning in California. He commented that monitors have been popularizing the data in real time. He said that he is pleased that this type of regulation exists but that both sides can improve these systems.

An attendee asked if there is already a plan to regulate the use of these systems in schools.

Saúl Guzmán mentioned that the effort to use this standard is to establish a criterion so that all systems in the country use the same mechanism of communication to the public. He commented that they have an informal agreement with the secretary of health to send them a contamination report so that they can interpret it and make warnings, announcements and approaches to the most vulnerable places.

Implementation of the Flag Program in Mexicali; Alberto Mejía, Environmental Civic Committee for the Involvement of Society.

Ray Askins said that he found out that in December the air was clean when everyone was doing their part and the police was enforcing, then on January 1st it was a disaster and nobody cared including law enforcement. He mentioned that they need a greater level of enforcement for the holidays that are coming up.

Alberto Mejía commented that what happened on December 24 and 25 was that on the 23rd it rained all day and that this was a large part of the good air quality observed by **Ray Askins**. He said he hopes that by October they will sit down to work on a campaign of diffusion and regulation at all levels.

Rodrigo Ortega congratulated **Alberto Mejía** and **Iván Martínez** for all their community effort. He said he would later like to request a hearing or presentation from the committee because the root problems have not been addressed. He commented that Baja California is the second state in the country with more deforestation problems and less green areas and that Mexicali is the municipality with the least green areas. He said that they have a quarry in Sierra Cucapah where a geologist made a statement where the exploitation of stone materials continues to be concessioned.

An attendee commented that he really liked the culture of Mexicali because they are open to dialogue. He said few schools have accepted the schools program. He mentioned that there should be more citizen involvement in these talks since most of them are governments talking to other governments.

Juan Serrato observed that in May and June there is no  green and it is when the agricultural plots are burned. **1.41.20**

Alberto Mejía mentioned that they lack the factors that affect the dispersion of pollutants such as winds and temperatures in these analyzes. He said that they already have that information, but they lack depth in that matter. He mentioned that they have talked about having a workshop on the results of the first year and the understanding of those situations. He commented that in those months there have been a small number of burns, which are plots that were not planted in time and they are burned preventively.

Izadora Ordoñez commented that they need to verbalize what is done inside the municipality. She said they have two intentions on this issue and one is to go regulate emission sources. She commented that there are situations that do not have the immediate attribution to regulate it but that affect the quality of the municipality such as agricultural burning, tire burning and vehicle verification and they have to start monitoring these situations. She said that there are clear intentions reforest, recover ecological spaces, minimize the amount of emissions and promote comprehensive garbage management. She commented that it is necessary to modify the regulations, formats and internal organization to be able to do all this. She mentioned that they have specific attention with the lagoon system because it is a specific objective of the administration. She said there are approximately 220 schools they will work with. She said they have to fight for the participation of vehicle verification. She mentioned that the municipal councilor **Yaneth Tapia** was present at the meeting

Yaneth Tapia commented that the previous day the amendment to the environmental regulations was approved in order to attack the issue of burning solid waste and tires.

Alberto Mejía mentioned that it is very important for them to recognize this type of effort, but it is necessary to continue insisting on the management's budget and they hope that when the budget adjustment is made, it will return or even increase. He commented that this is necessary in order to implement the changes that are made in the regulations. He used the 2018 Environmental Contingency Plan as an example, which was never implemented and two years after it will be restructured.

Elizabeth Melgoza asked what precautions are taken at schools when the air quality is low because one of the problems they face in the states is the lack of staff needed to take care of the kids indoors.

Alberto Mejía commented that there are schools that don't let the kids go outside, but there are also schools that do decide to let them outside.

Saúl Guzmán asked the audience to record their comments in order to finish the agenda.

Mexicali Work Plan Update and 2020 Updates; Elizabeth Melgoza and Laura Lawrence, CARB

Alberto Mejía asked if there is something similar that can be done in Mexico with what they proposed with stoves in businesses that use coal outdoors.

Elizabeth Melgoza said that the funding they received was from USCPA and she doesn't know if that can be used on projects in Mexico but the supplemental environmental project process could be used towards that.

Alberto Mejía asked what kind of organization would have to submit the project.

Elizabeth Melgoza said that it could be through the Task Force.

Alberto Mejía mentioned that what he was referring to is that RESPIRA can no longer take on another project, but perhaps the city council or someone else can.

Elizabeth Melgoza said that they haven't done subs for Mexico before but that that's something they have to work through.

Belen Leon said that one of the question would be if that they are able to do it through the SEP program and supplemental programs through the EPA.

An attendee said that it is possible to find the means to relate a problem that arises on the Mexican side with a consequence on the United States side in order to link a project that is carried out on the Mexican side and thus have an American resource in Mexico.

Laura Lawrence said that they've been thinking about that. She mentioned some policies state that the grant has to be used in the US.

Luis Olmedo commented that the policy that created the supplemental projects is AB617. He commented that this money historically went to the state of California and they created that policy to be able to redirect that money to their communities of environmental justice. He mentioned that the fact that they are offering that policy to someone else is not ok. He added that if there is a relationship between the environmental justice communities with Mexico, it is something that they should consult with them first. He mentioned that this border plan is very focused on Mexicali and they hardly mention the Imperial Valley and said that it is time to work collaboratively.

Imperial County-Mexicali Work Plan Update; Laura Lawrence, CARB

Ray Askins asked what part of the trillion trees that president Trump mentioned will be planted in this program.

Laura Lawrence answered that it's not something they've talked about for border 2025 but they can think about where that might fit in.

An attendee asked if Imperial County possible getting attainment status will not qualify them for the targeted air shed funding.

Laura Lawrence said the eligibility for that grant is based on the PM2.5 standards and it will not be affected by the attainment status.

An attendee mentioned that for PM2.5 and ozone it would still attained.

II. Border 2020 Project and Updates

Belen Leon mentioned that a lot of the projects that the APCD and AQTF have been already been mentioned by **Alberto Mejía**, **Laura Lawrence** and **Lizzy Melgoza** but they have one more that they've been working on which is the survey for Ambientelizate Campaign which is still work in progress.

Ryan Atencio commented that the US funds can be used in Mexicali, but there are some details which must be discussed first. He added that the projects must have a link with the transport of pollutants from Mexicali to California.

Belen Leon said that there were going to be looking for more projects in reference to the AQTF in Mexicali and welcome anyone to do a project with them.

III. Updates from Federal, State, Local Governments, and Others

Daniel Yáñez wanted to emphasize being vigilant in monitoring activities that produce some type of contamination. He said that taking into account the instability caused by the change of government and budget cuts, they will continue to stick to their work programs in all parts of the government.

Saúl Guzmán mentioned that they are working on the design of the state environmental plan where the main strategies and local goals will be presented. He said that they already have 3 work meetings with the environmental protection directorates to address various regulatory issues.

An attendee said that proposals for agricultural burning be made in a comprehensive way.

IV. Closing / Date for the Next Meeting

An attendee commented that another problem that is not being addressed is stray dogs relieving themselves on the street. He added that he can take care of that problem but needs support from others. He said he has an idea to be able to raise funds without going to companies or the government.

Luis Olmedo asked CARB to bring analyzed data from all the low-cost sensors in the US to present to Mexicali the impact caused from Coachella that comes from LA. He said it's necessary to see that data. He commented that the governor added funds to combat the situation of The Salton Sea. He added that there is a new pipeline for the New River.

Lilian Garcia said they have seen problems with the IVAN Network that contradicts regulatory sensors and those of Purple Air.

Iván Martínez asked if there is any reforestation projects.

Elizabeth Melgoza said there are no reforestation projects in the work plan.

Saúl Guzmán thanked CANACINTRA for providing the facilities.

Belen Leon said that the next meeting is on May 7th at SDSU in Calexico

Meeting adjourned.