

**Air Quality Task Force Meeting  
Mexicali / Imperial  
Mexicali, Baja California  
December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Co-chairs: Belen León; Saul Guzman; Reyes**

**I. Attendance:**

**José Carmelo Zavala**, Baja California Government Undersecretary for Sustainable Development; **Amy Zimpfer**, EPA; **Ben Gibson**, EPA; **Laura Lawrence**, EPA; **Beth Landis**, EPA; **Elizabeth Melgoza**, CARB; **Fernando Amador**, CARB; **Aracely Carrillo Torres**, Imperial County Public Health Department; **Iván Martínez**, REDSPIRA; **José Luis Zamora**, REDSPIRA; **Alberto Mexia**, REDSPIRA; **Patricia Torres**, REDSPIRA; **Emmanuel Sánchez**, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District; **Efraín Nieblas**, City of Mexicali; **Raúl Tovar**, Air Quality Department, SPA; **Ray Askins**, Environmentalist; **Craig Deutsche**, Environmentalist; **Edie Harmon**, Environmentalist; **Astrid Calderas**, Medio Ambiente Sano, **Reyes Romero**, ICAPCD,.

**II. Welcome and Opening Remarks**

Belen Leon presented herself and thanked everyone for their attendance.

Saul Guzmán welcomed everyone and presented himself as the new co-chair along with Belen Leon.

Elizabeth Melgoza thanked everyone for their attendance. She mentioned that there is EPA staff in the meeting and encourage the attendance to stay after the meeting and talk about any air quality issues or concerns anyone has.

**III. Review of the Minutes from the Last Meeting.**

Astrid Calderas said a comment of hers was omitted and it was noted. Astrid Calderas added that "It is impossible for regulatory monitors to reflect what people observe regarding pollution because although regulatory systems are based on the NowCast System, which has been improved, based on averages of 8, 12 or 24 hours depending on the pollutant, it is impossible for them to show at the right moment the levels of pollution that people observe with the naked eye."

Belen Leon approved the comments for the September 12<sup>th</sup> Minutes.

**IV. Presentations / Questions and Answers**

**New Administration Update in Relation to the Air Quality Programs and New Projects; Dr. Efraín Nieblas, Director of the Directorate of Environmental Protection for the City of Mexicali.**

Ray Askins commented that there are serious weaknesses in Efraín Nieblas' presentation. The first one is they need to have inspectors that stop people from burning wood, using fireworks, etc. He asked if there were going to be more than 3 or 4 inspectors that will be actively enforcing the law. He said that people that pick up the trash now choose what they'll take and what they'll leave behind. He mentioned it seems that people enjoy piling up their trash so everyone can see it.

Astrid Calderas said she likes the work plan, but it's not clear what the whole plan tries to establish. She asked where citizens can report industrial emissions. She mentioned that she was amazed that the authorities could

stop the use of fireworks in Mexicali. She also said that citizen participation in terms of complaints and reports of industrial emissions increased considerably. She asked what the protocol is to follow to eliminate industrial emissions and how do they respond to citizen complaints. She also asked what the response of the Government Delegate regarding the use of fireworks was and what will be the number of inspectors in Mexicali that will follow up on citizens' environmental concerns and reports.

**Efrain Nieblas** answering to **Ray Askins**, said he disagrees with his comment that people like to display their garbage in clandestine dumps. As for the inspectors, He showed a table in the presentation that shows the budget they have, he mentioned that the budget is too low to hire more inspectors. He said they are exploring other avenues to bring more resources to solve the deficit of inspectors so they can enforce the law properly. Answering **Astrid Calderas'** question about citizen complaints, he mentioned that they will always have an inability to attend them all but that they have made an effort to train more police officers to respond adequately to environmental complaints. He mentioned that their job is to have to strictly monitor compliance with commercial establishments. As for industrial emissions, PROFEPA handles a certain level of industry at the federal level, and another set of companies corresponds to the state level. He reiterated that it is very important to increase the level of inspectors and that they are already in talks with waste management companies in Mexicali. He said that the protocol for making a complaint is calling 911 and this center derives the complaint to the corresponding area, there are also citizens who go directly to the offices of the Sub-secretariat of Environmental Protection of the State or the Municipality, even PROFEPA at the Federal level to make complaints. He commented that they had no response from the government delegate but that they will be on the lookout.

**Ray Askins** said they should start giving out heavy fines as a means for additional income.

**Alberto Mexia** asked what is the coherence of the mayor of Mexicali regarding the comments he made that say the environment is a high priority issue, but they have a budget of 11 million pesos compared to Social Communication and Public Relations that has a budget of 30 million pesos.

#### **EPA HQ Border Strategy and Multipollutant Approach; Benjamin Gibson and Beth Landis, EPA.**

**Eddie Harmon** noted that on one of the slides said that Imperial is a border city. She said that it actually isn't a border city and that the correct city would be Calexico. She commented that there is a lot of off-road activity in Imperial County that occurs in public lands. She said that during the holiday season there is a lot of off-road vehicles in the desert creating clouds of dust and that this is carrying over to Mexicali. She said it will be imperative for the county to reduce the amount of off-road vehicle activity in these public lands.

**Benjamin Gibson** thanked **Eddie** for her comment and said that they will look into that.

**An attendee** said it wasn't clear to him how a multipollutant approach is different than addressing the six pollutants individually.

**Beth Landis** said that the research they've made indicated that certain control strategies might look better for one pollutant than another and that looking at them jointly increases health benefits.

**Ray Askins** asked what is going to happen to all these great ideas when they get the results. He mentioned he sees no game plan for this. He commented that a good intermediate idea is planting trees starting in the schools. He said the kids would love the idea of having a tree with their name on it and adoption papers for it.

**Amy Zimpfer** from the EPA thanked everyone for all the comments they provided. She mentioned the day before the meeting they had a tour in Mexicali and said that there has been some progress but it hasn't been great. She thanked **Eddie** for her comment about all the off-road activity in Imperial and said that it would be a great discussion to be had in a later meeting. She added that the multipollutant approach has worked in some places but not in others, she added that this does not mean they will stop their pollutant-by-pollutant approach.

She commented she's seen the multipollutant approach work in other parts of the country when it comes to air toxins and it can also enhance the cost-benefit of not having to do a pollutant by pollutant approach.

**Edie Harmon** said that the two locations in Imperial County with the highest density populations are Centinela State Prison and Calipatria State Prison. She said that if there are any health problems related to the air quality these are the populations that will be hit first. She commented that this should be a concern to the State of California because the taxpayers are going to pay for any health problems the inmates have. She mentioned asking multiple times for air quality monitors in those areas but she has been ignored.

**Fernando Flores Pradis** commented that when binational projects are made, the culture, customs and history of the places should be respected. He invited everyone to involve not only the scientific aspect but also consider an engaged civil society. He added that his organization specifically fights for transparency of resources because each city is different and you cannot copy something that works in one place and expect it to work in another. He said they would have liked to accompany EPA to the tour they did in Mexicali because it is important to witness progress when there is transparency in wanting to move forward. He mentioned that there are problems of premature deaths in Mexicali. He reiterated that if the authority invites them to these types of events they will gladly attend.

**Luis Olmedo** commented that the EPA was part of the Making a Visible Difference project a few years ago by funneling its resources and programs to communities like Imperial. He said that this has now stopped but the State of California has stepped up and picked up the slack. He mentioned that the State has made it clear they're invested in this. He commented that the 3 governors of the California's met the day before this meeting to re-initiate the Commission of the California's. He said that he would like clarification by the EPA about Imperial getting reclassified to attainment because they still have serious issues with the Salton Sea, off-roading in public lands and also asked about a monitor in Calexico that was underreporting for PM10. He commented that he doesn't see how EPA is on the side of the people of their community. He added that he's seen the EPA at their best responding to communities but that's not where they are right now. He continued saying that he was born in Mexicali and knows both sides of the border and mentioned he sees a lot of growth of interest from all sectors wanting to work with them on air quality in California. He said that California and the US are responsible for their residents and the emissions that come from here and affect another country, he said that EPA is jumping ahead by wanting to solve problems in Mexicali. He mentioned that the EPA has a responsibility to them. He asked if they are going to utilize low-cost sensors for enforcement because they have 40 in the community.

**Amy Zimpfer** agreed on California stepping up and getting additional resources and having **Lizzy Melgoza** bringing focus in the area and Mexicali. She said that Making a Visible Difference provided additional funding like adding more sensors for the IVAN Network. She said that CARB should answer the question regarding the sensor that was underreporting but that all she knows is that the issue has been resolved. Answering the question about reclassifying Imperial, she said that this was in fact proposed in the PM10 plan was made by the Imperial Air District and the State of California, it was prepared to evaluate the sources of dust, monitors, and air quality when you get dust storms in the area. She said that this plan has a number of components and that they haven't proposed any action on yet, one component is looking at the data and what it is telling them both in what is manmade caused and what is caused by high wind events in the desert area, another component is looking at what are the rules in place that the Air District and the state have in place to control those emission sources that can be controlled at a required level. Another component is the area attaining if you took away those dust events and natural occurrences. She said that if they do reclassify the area they have yearly check-ins in place for the next 10 years to maintain that attainment. Another part of this maintenance plan is emerging sources which include the Salton Sea which will be factored in in this plan. She commented that whenever they propose a plan they will have a 30-day public comment period and are required by law to publish all those comments on the internet and evaluate all of them, they then evaluate if they missed any information when they proposed the action and then they decide to cancel the proposal, go ahead with the proposal, or change it in which they can be another public comment period if the change is significant enough.

**Luis Olmedo** said that CARB committed to a creation of a border unit and now the secretary and governor have a different plan. He mentioned that they felt that the unit was going to be effective and going to be a real investment. He said that they don't have that unit anymore and feel that they need to go back and make sure the EPA is doing their due diligence because they need EPA on the ground collecting information.

**Ray Askins** mentioned that there is a big problem with single-use plastic. He said they need to force the producers of plastic to buy their plastics back. He noticed this issue is being ignored and there no serious commitment to this matter.

#### **Imperial County Agricultural Burn Program; Emmanuel Sanchez, Imperial County APCD.**

**Eddie Harmon** asked if they have any way to make the presentation available to the public.

**Emmanuel Sanchez** said he'll pass it on to **Belen Leon** so she can make it available.

**An attendee** asked if there will be other methods available in the future instead of burning.

**Emmanuel Sanchez** said that some of the burnings take place when farmers want to change vegetation to another crop and burning is the most effective way of doing this. He said another reason could be pests in the fields that you want to get rid of. He mentioned disking could be another method but it creates a lot of dust. He commented that you either get the emissions PM2.5 from the burning or PM10 from the disking of the fields.

**An attendee** asked about the use of compost.

**Emmanuel Sanchez** said that as far as he knows they don't have any composting of the materials of the fields.

**Ben Gibson** mentioned he saw a trend down from 2009 to the most recent years going from 66,000 to 12,000 acres burned and that 24,000 of those are attributable to the EIRC Program. He asked if they know what accounts for the other roughly 30,000 reduced acres burned.

**Emmanuel Sanchez** said a lot of their farming is market-driven. He mentioned that 2009 was their excessively high wheat season in the valley including Mexicali and all of that wheat had to be burned. He also attributed it to changing diets, wheat not being grown as it used to and fields turning organic.

**Tomas Oliva** commented that he's against agricultural burning. He said that as a council member in El Centro, he wants to push for the elimination of ag-burning and asked the council to adopt a letter addressed to the California State Senator as well as working with the local farmers to get to near zero agricultural burnings. He mentioned getting a lot of push back from other council members saying that the bulk of emissions from ag-burning is coming from Mexicali. He asked his colleagues from Mexicali in the meeting to raise that issue over there.

**Belen Leon** said that it was very important to show what the US side is doing against agricultural burning because Mexicali does have an active ag-burning campaign but it is very hard for them to enforce it.

**Eddie Harmon** mentioned that there are lots of feedlots in the area with animal manure and a lot of plant waste. She mentioned Imperial County has an opportunity to mix ag-waste with animal waste and it will make better quality compost.

#### **Mexicali Work Plan Update; Elizabeth Melgoza, CARB.**

**Eddie Harmon** said that if the speed limit was reduced back to 55 mph, vehicles would be much more efficient and get better mileage. She also mentioned when she bought her car the dealership discouraged her from buying an electric vehicle because the batteries don't hold up in the weather the valley has. She said she's concerned about the idea of getting more electric vehicles because that might bring additional problems.

**Elizabeth Melgoza** said that they want to get an idea if people throughout the State in Change of Ownership Smog Check areas are keeping up with their vehicle maintenance. She said CARB has conducted studies

comparing vehicle emissions in disadvantaged/non-disadvantaged communities and the findings show that the same model and year of car can be dirtier if not properly maintained.

**Ray Askins** asked if they were going to do anything about Zahori because they keep contaminating the air quality. He mentioned that whenever the wind is blowing his direction the monitors go up to 155-175.

**Craig Deutsche** said that the data they showed of the monitors was based on a 24-hour average. He mentioned if someone has asthma and there's a one-hour high wind event that person can end up in the hospital. He commented that he thinks the 24 hours' average is not relevant for health effects.

**Elizabeth Melgoza** said that they can show that information next time around. She commented she agrees with him on that you will see unhealthier air quality on a 1-hour average.

## V. Border 2020 Projects and Updates

**Amy Zimpfer** thanked **Margarito Quintero** for his leadership over the years. She thanked the Air District and **Belen Leon**. She also thanked her co-regulators in CARB. She mentioned that even though they don't have the same presence as before, they will still continue to search and find resources to bring into the county.

**Laura Lawrence** thanked Amy for having senior management join her. Regarding Border 2020, she said they've gone through a funding cycle and that they had quite a few applicants for the Border 2020 grants for this cycle. NADBANK is the grantor and selected 8 new projects for funding, 3 of which are in the Cali-Baja area and the other 5 in the Arizona-Sonora area. She said that 2 of the projects are air quality projects in the Imperial-Mexicali area. One of those two is in collaboration with Imperial and the other is a UC Berkeley research project that looks at transportation corridors in Mexicali with sensor data. She said the targeted airshed grant is an EPA-wide grant that they have nationally which is granted to the top 5 most polluted air sheds for ozone and PM2.5. The goal of that grant is to reduce pollution in the countries most polluted airsheds. She said Border 2025 is being developed and they want feedback about what went well with the previous border program. She mentioned they will ask for feedback from the task force in a more structured way but in the meantime, they can call her. She said the State Implementation Plan is a plan that is required for areas that are not attaining the criteria pollutant standards. She mentioned these are put together locally and APCD takes the lead, they are then sent to CARB for review, after the review they send it to the EPA if it's adopted locally and statewide. She mentioned they recently proposed approval of the Ozone Implementation Plan which includes a demonstration that the area would attain the standards except for emissions coming from Mexico, it also included an analysis of control measures and also included RACT (Reasonable Available Control Technology). She said the public comment ended that week for the Ozone Plan and they will consider all of them. She commented that they haven't taken action on the PM2.5 Plan and the PM10 Maintenance Plan and Re-designation request.

## VI. Updates on Projects from Federal, State, and Local Governments

**José Carmelo Zavala** mentioned that the new government did not have time to prepare something for this meeting, but for the next meeting they will have more material. He commented on the issue of pollution and said that it is difficult when there are not a lot of resources. He added that the governor of Baja California plans to regularize the 'chocolate' cars. He said they still think this forum is extremely important to them. He mentioned that they have been reflecting on what has been going on pollution wise and how they can fix it in the short term. He commented that at the state level 4 secretaries were concentrated in one and that the Ministry of Environmental Protection is now a sub-secretariat and thinks that their resources will be reduced a little.

**Belen Leon** said that the APCD is working on an effort for the AB 617 and said the CARB board is coming on January the 15<sup>th</sup> to approve the Community Emission Reductions Program.

**Elizabeth Melgoza** said all the presentations will be available online and will also be sent out via email.

**Alberto Mexia** said that thanks to an agreement with Mexico's Climate Initiative, they are invited to participate in the Citizen Observatory of Air Quality in Mexico City. He said that thanks to this link they are constantly receiving information at the federal level. He commented that they had a meeting with SEMARNAT and realized that all the big decisions are made in Mexico City and that they also have problems of not having simple answers to the challenges of air quality.

**Edie Harmon** asked if they could change the slides with the print in black with a white background.

**Lilly Garcia** said that the office of health and safety came out and took air samples at the new river and will continue to take them periodically.

## **VII. Closing / Date for the Next Meeting**

**Belen Leon** said that the next meeting is February 6<sup>th</sup> in Mexicali.

**Meeting Adjourned.**