

**Minutes of the Air Quality task Force Meeting
Mexicali / Imperial
September 6th, 2018
UCSD, Calexico**

Co-chairs: Reyes Romero; Margarito Quintero

I. Attendance:

Reyes Romero, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District; **Margarito Quintero**, SPA; **Sandy Lam**, U.S. Consulate in Tijuana, Baja California; **Fernando Flores**, OBSERBC; **Gabriela Ruiz**, OBSERBC; **Alejandra Alvarez**, OBSERBC; **Julio Morales**, Imperial Valley Press; **Ray Askins**, environmentalist; **Elizabeth Melgoza**, CARB; **Belen Leon**, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District; **Jeremy Bauer**, USEPA.

II. Welcome and Initial Comments

Reyes Romero welcomed and thanked everybody for taking time off their busy agendas to be at the meeting.

Margarito Quintero said he was very happy to see everybody once more, and he mentioned they were going to have a very interesting session about a binational work that he hoped would bring good results.

III. Revision of Minutes from Prior Meeting

Reyes Romero asked at this time if they had any comments or suggestions with regards to the Minutes from the prior meeting. **Ray Askins** said he wanted to compliment those who put the Minutes together for doing a better job this time around. Not having any other comments or suggestions from the group, the minutes were approved.

IV. Presentations / Questions and Answers

PM 2.5 Air Quality Monitoring Effort in Mexicali and the Update on the Upcoming Draft Work Plan to Improve Air Quality in the Border Region; Elizabeth Melgoza, California Air Resources Board

Ray Askins said he would like to see consistency on the monitoring and data from year to year in order to come up with a definitive trend line. He also mentioned that he knew that this last December PM 2.5 had been high comparably speaking, which means something happened. He added that there are three different industries that are not being regulated by the Mexican Government and that something should be done about that. He said that tire burning also contributes to air pollution and that those who burn tires to get the metal from them try not to cause black smoke in order to disguise what they are doing.

Elizabeth Melgoza said they would consider his observations and that she was going to talk more about tire burning later on during her presentation because it was something they were looking into. She also mentioned that as far as she knew, the state has a regulation people turning in that metal to redeem money for it.

Jeremy Bauer asked if they were planning to include wind roses or a pollutant rose graphics on the presentation because he thinks that would be helpful in the report. He also asked if the time frame for the emissions inventory would be around September / October.

Elizabeth Melgoza said that would be the time frame indeed.

Ray Askins mentioned that he knew that the EPA air monitor on Ethel St. was understating the air quality because they had changed their method of measuring the air quality to a thousand and he had noticed that her illustration does not reflect that because of that factor

Elizabeth Melgoza stated that they were aware of that and that there could be a chance that the PM 2.5 concentrations shown on her illustration were even higher than that. She also mentioned that they were increasing the threshold on the PM 10 monitors as well.

Ray Askins said there should be more efforts on burning tires. He mentioned a recycling plant had caused a fire the prior month in Tijuana, and that there had been another fire in Imperial County because of hay burning, both having impacted the air quality in the region. He said they should be doing a better job on preventing these kinds of incidents.

Elizabeth Melgoza said that as part of the work plan, they are looking into talking to the city of Mexicali to see if they could have a community air monitoring network much more like Imperial does. She also mentioned that educating and making people aware of all the sources that are impacting their health is a key thing to do, and she finished thanking him for his comments.

Reyes Romero mentioned that on her presentation it was very obvious that the days on which they have the highest impact of PM 2.5 are during Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve because of the fireworks traditionally used to celebrate these festivities. He added that because of this, they have been implementing a media campaign in order to educate and make people aware of the impacts of burning fireworks and tires among other things. He added that the local government was going to have more law enforcement on these days to prevent these types of burning. On the other hand, he said that during the rest of the year, what impacts the most the Mexicali valley is agricultural burning, and that the measures that are being taken to prevent agricultural burning in Mexicali Valley were going to be discussed in the following week. He finished stating that this was a big step being taken by the state.

Margarito Quintero said he was interested on finding out the origin of the particulates that migrate from Mexicali into Calexico contributing to those high PM 2.5 values. He said that if they were aware of the pollution source, and just as **Ray Askins** had mentioned, they could point out the companies, such as thermo-electrical plants or companies like Sahori as contributors to this problem, and asked what was lacking in order to be able to do so. As far as agricultural burning, he said that as **Reyes Romero** had already mentioned, taking necessary measures was important. He also said he wanted to mention that the government was not going to include fireworks as part of the festivities to celebrate Independence Day in Mexico in order to avoid air pollution.

An Attendee asked if in terms of just the regular monitoring, the data is continuing being sent through AQS.

Elizabeth Melgoza said that once they get the alerts and forecasting contract into place if they do not have the new contract in, the data will continue being sent through AQS. She also mentioned that although this might sound like dire sounding news, a lot of good things had been starting to happen especially in Mexicali, which is the city with a recent ordinance to fine people for littering and burning. She added that it would be interesting to see how much of an impact that really is going to have this winter season. She said they were headed in the right direction and that she was excited to see how all this things working together will help the air quality in the region.

Ray Askins said the problem with law enforcement was that corruption creeps in.

Elizabeth Melgoza said her thought on that was that people are going to get ticketed for burning or littering, regardless.

Ray Askins said he certainly hoped so, because corruption in Mexico prevails as part of their culture, and there had to be incentives for enforcement.

An Attendee mentioned that they should be mindful of the way they participate in these kinds of meetings because the issues discussed at this table affect both sides of the border. He said it was necessary to be precise because from these meetings government work comes up, which then turns into public policy. He stated their work was finding solutions for environmental issues putting corruption aside. He said that some of the companies that contribute to air pollutant emissions were established in a zone that was far from the urban area years back. He explained that in cases like this, Mexican law cannot be applied retroactively. Thus, the importance of groups such as this one, on which ideas and strategies should be shared in order to improve these kinds of situations. He mentioned that the Mexican government had made the commitment of doing anything within its power to reform existing rules and regulations at a local level so that much stricter sanctions are given to those who burn fireworks, tires, etc., and that they had already done so. He explained that through these new regulations, they were going to implement the Clean Air program, which takes place in Mexicali during the last three months of the year. He said that under this program, street inspection is done in order to confiscate wood, tires, fireworks, etc.

Reyes Romero said he agreed with him, and he also added that this was an open forum on which an opinion can be expressed and although it might be wrong, this is a place to freely express opinions and learn from each other as far as measures and practices that have worked for them in order to reduce impact in their communities.

Fernando Flores congratulated **Elizabeth Melgoza** on her research, and asked when environmental agencies would translate their findings into health issues in order to activate international alerts on both sides of the border in order to take action and solve environmental issues on both countries. He said an action plan that includes education should be put into operation for generations to come.

Margarito Quintero mentioned that if you look at the measures outlined on the Pro Aire, you would realize that part of the solution is already there, and that the idea was for the involved sectors to commit to following them. He also said there were different research studies from different organizations that have already shown that PM 2.5 emissions and particulate matter in general, affect public health, but that he wanted to point out that the solution to these issues at a local and state level were found just there in the Pro Aire.

Ray Askins said with regards to the companies that contribute to the PM 2.5 emissions and affect the community around them, but were established on areas that were far from the city some time ago, he still believes Sahori is a bad actor and that some other credible sources would agree with him on this. He said a change of attitude and culture is needed within the government and those who work for the government or nothing would change.

Reyes Romero mentioned that the US has rules and regulations which require certain type of companies such as feed lots to install control measures, and that this has helped them reduce community impacts. He also said that one of the proposals through Pro Aire was precisely to regulate this sector in order to be able demand these types of control measures.

An Attendee mentioned that Mexicali was planning on having citizen emergency and alert protocols. He also mentioned that having a binational monitoring network that would allow people to be aware of the air quality conditions in their region was a promising project. He said that as far as policy making goes they have moved forward, and that it has been a valuable work done not only by government agencies, but also by the community through sharing their input and support. He also added that **Margarito Quintero** would probably present some good proposals on this matter on behalf of the state. He said that one of the issues they are facing when it comes to requiring companies to have control measures to reduce emissions is that they do not know where to get the tools or devices in order to do so. He said that unfortunately their list of suppliers for this purpose has only two options for this purpose. Therefore, he suggested coming up with a list of companies that offer these tools, devices and types of services, and that also comply with environmental regulations.

V. Border 2020 Projects and Updates; Jeremy Bauer / USEPA

Jeremy Bauer informed that Mike Stoker had been appointed as a new leader for EPA Region 9, which covers California, Arizona, Hawaii, and Nevada and that he was very glad to report that one of his top priorities are environmental issues in the border region. He mentioned that they have a sister air quality task force for San Diego / Tijuana and that they were going to be meeting on September 26th from 12:30 to 4:30 at the US Consulate General in Tijuana and that the meeting would be shared by **Margarito Quintero** from SPA and **Bill Brick** from the San Diego County Air Pollution Control District. He said that among the topics they would share were updates on monitoring networks, trends in the data, updates on attainment status, community monitoring efforts going on including a Border 2020 Project that the EPA is funding to put in 6 monitors on the Tijuana side of the border as well as some CalEnviroScreen updates and other topics such as wild fires, illicit burning, air toxic and smog, and they were also going to provide time within the agenda for citizen concerns. He said that if anybody was interested to attend this meeting they were welcome to do so, but that they would have to require registration in advance because they have to follow the US Consulate protocol and provide a list of names of attendees to the meeting beforehand. He informed that EPA was going to be funding the tribe Torres Martinez to put in a monitor at Salton Sea beach to test particulate matter coming from the Salton Sea in an area that is not currently being monitored. He also mentioned that another project that they are funding is a pilot program that is going on at the Nogales / Arizona region to quantify the public health benefits of the Unified Cargo Processing, which is an effort where the US Customs works directly with the Mexican Customs to save the amount of time it takes to process each cargo truck that could sometimes take up to 8 hours in the past, and under this program they have seen it could be reduced to anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour. He said hopefully other ports of entry would follow the same practice if it is shown that it is of great benefit.

VI. Updates from Federal, State and Local Governments

Reyes Romero said that the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District in partnership with Comité Cívico del Valle had applied for some funding from Assembly Bill 617 with a great chance of this application being accepted. He said that if it is accepted, they will be working on an emission reduction plan in the corridor of Calexico, Heber and El Centro. He said it would be a five year plan, which would include some air monitoring and they were hoping this would bring some benefit to this community. He also mentioned the District continues working on a state implementation plan for PM 10, and that they were conducting workshops for this plan on September 27th, one in El Centro, and another one in the north for which this group would be receiving invitations. He said they were planning to take their state implementation plan for PM 10 to their board on late October. He informed that on September 11th, they would be proposing adaptation of rules 428 and 429 regarding regulation of wood burning emissions in order to convince the community that still have wood burning fire places to convert to natural gas or some of the cleaner fuels. Finally, he announced that Belen Leon had been promoted to management in their office and that now she would be in charge of border issues and grants, and as part of her new role she would now become the co-chair representing Imperial County for this task force.

Margarito Quintero said that as he had mentioned before, a project had been proposed through the CONACYT mixed fund and the state of Baja California. He explained that the funding would be used to purchase infrastructure for the air quality monitoring equipment, and that he was happy to inform them that 3 companies had already submitted their proposal to get the project. He said that they should know the name of the company that would buy the equipment for the benefit of the Secretariat by October 7th. He said the funding for this project was of about 20 million pesos, and that he hoped to get and manage well. He also shared having been invited by the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change to an air quality training that they would organize from September 9th to September 11th, and that a person from their team was scheduled to go on their behalf. Lastly, he said to have been together with the Environmental Protection Secretary Thelma Castañeda at the US Consulate in Tijuana at a meeting where they had had the chance to meet with the consul in charge of economic affairs, who was also at the meeting. He said it had been a very interesting meeting, and that he would like to highlight that the consul had mentioned to have the plan of installing an air monitor, possibly at the Consulate or somewhere in Tijuana, just like they had done

at US Embassy in Beijing in order to monitor the air quality of the city. He added that she said that it could also form part of the monitoring network at a state level.

Sandy Lam said she would like to clarify that the air monitoring program at the embassy and the Consulate does exist and that as **Margarito** mentioned, the embassy in Beijing was the first one to have a monitoring program installed in the year 2008 or 2009. Since then, she explained that this program has been spread out through all over our embassies and consulates worldwide. She said to have arrived to Tijuana barely less than two months ago, but that she was previously at Beijing when this program was lounged, and that although she has not work on this monitoring program in the past, this was her goal for the consulate in Tijuana during her time here. She added that there is a formal program to have an air monitoring system installed at the Consulate in order to provide air quality data for US citizens because as a Consulate their number one goal is the health and wellbeing of US citizens abroad. However, she said that additionally to this goal, the data that they collect would be made available for the local government in Mexico. She said it was not a done deal, yet. She said that it was a process that she would pursue until the very end.

Jeremy Bauer said there had been some conversations about this program back in 2016, and that there was uncertainty as to whether or not it was actually going to be implemented, but that they would be happy to help and he offered support in any technical write ups.

Sandy Lam said they had received a formal cable from Washington, D.C. with the overview of the type of program including the implementation cost, the annual monitoring maintenance cost, and a lot of specific details. Thus, this program is going to continue and she said they are going to pursue options to find funding for it.

Elizabeth Mendoza asked what pollutants they were planning to measure and if they had considered uploading the data for public use.

Sandy Lam said she did not have an accurate answer at the moment, but that she knew that the monitor in Beijing measures PM 2.5, and that she did not see why they would not make this data available.

Ray Askins said that in his opinion the language should always be the same so that when the time comes to publicize it, it is out there for the whole world to see. He also said they were doing an excellent job.

Fernando Flores said they were planning to form part of the national air quality monitoring network, and that they were currently working. He said they were working so that the monitoring station that they currently have becomes a fixed station in order to comply with regulations for this purpose. He said that by the end of the month, they were hoping to already be able to publish this information on their website as well as to share it with their neighbors in the US side. He also mentioned they were going to continue with the Aire Limpio para Mexicali program, which takes place during the last three months of the year. He explained this is an inspection program done together with the local Public Utility Management, Street Vending, and local Public Security Management in order to prevent sale of Fireworks and other combustion materials. He added that they were going to try to strengthen this program with an outreach campaign inform and make people aware of the consequences of using these types of materials.

Reyes Romero mentioned that the media campaign that they do every year with EPA resources was going to be done in collaboration with the municipality, the state, Imperial County, and CARB.

VII. Wrap up / Date of Next Meeting

Reyes Romero said the next meeting would be held in Mexicali on November 13th. He thanked everyone in attendance, and said he hoped to see them in Mexicali.

Margarito Quintero also thanked everyone for being there and said he hoped to see them at the next meeting in Mexicali.

Meeting Adjourned.