

Commission for Environmental Cooperation Secretariat



Activity Report

June 2006

A message from the Executive Director

Dear friends and colleagues,

The past twelve months began as they ended—on a very encouraging note for the Commission for Environmental Cooperation. The highlight of the June 2005 CEC Council session in Quebec City was the adoption of our new, five-year strategic plan. This was a great step forward in distilling the Council's longer-term vision into an achievable and measurable set of goals and objectives.

Consequently, this year has seen us move forward in the planning, implementation and achievement of some key elements of our cooperative program to protect the North American environment—a few of which I am happy to present below.

As I write this message we look forward to the publication by Mexico of its first industrial emissions database, the Registro de Emisiones y Transferencia de Contaminantes (RETC). This mandatory pollutant release and transfer register will list federally-regulated industrial plants and their emissions of 104 different toxic chemicals to the air, water and land.

The RETC is a pivotal step for Mexico and a major step forward for North America, filling a key gap in our understanding of the total, continent-wide volume of the release and transfer of certain toxic chemicals.

The publication of this information underlines the importance, and the promise, of ongoing, international cooperation. I invite you to continue to work with us to protect and enhance the environment in North America.

William V. Kennedy, Executive Director, CEC Secretariat

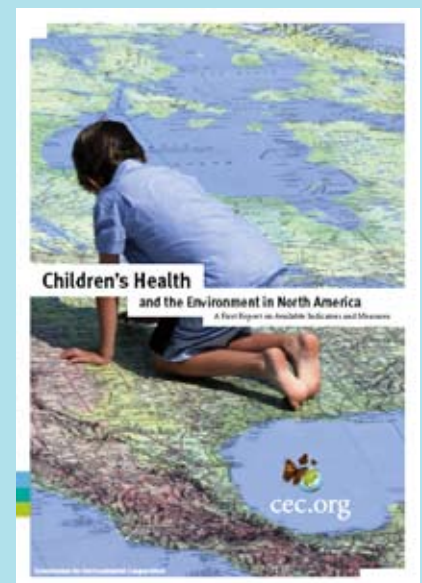
Region first to report children's health indicators

In January 2006, the CEC, in partnership with the International Joint Commission, the Pan American Health Organization, the World Health Organization (WHO), and the governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States, released the first-ever report on children's health and environment indicators in North America.

The report presented 13 indicators under three thematic areas: asthma and respiratory disease, effects of exposure to lead and other toxic substances, and waterborne diseases. It found that North American children remain at risk from environmental exposures and that children's health reporting must be improved to address data gaps identified in the report. For instance, only one of the indicators, addressing asthma in children, was fully reported by all three countries.

As the first regional report under the Global Initiative on Children's Environmental Health Indicators (CEHI)—led by WHO, spearheaded by the US EPA and launched at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg—it is anticipated that this report will contribute to worldwide efforts to improve children's health.

A copy of the report can be downloaded from www.cec.org/children.

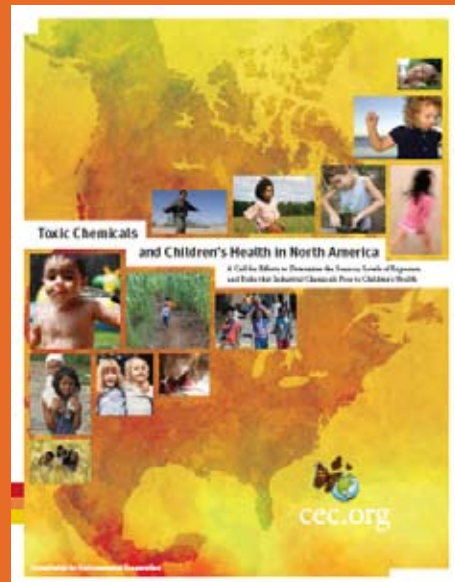


Report examines toxicity for chemicals affecting children

In May 2006, the CEC published a report that went beyond a simple listing and ranking of chemical releases. Using a methodology developed at the University of California, Berkeley, the report also compares chemicals in terms of their toxicity to describe the relative hazard of industrial chemical releases in North America.

Toxic Chemicals and Children's Health in North America focuses on the industrial chemical releases found in the pollutant release and transfer registers (PRTs) of Canada and the United States that can adversely affect children's health: carcinogens, developmental and reproductive toxicants, and suspected neurotoxicants. It finds that lead, mercury, PCBs, dioxins and furans, phthalates and manganese are substances of either significant or emerging concern.

The report includes a call for efforts to determine the sources, levels of exposure, and risks that industrial chemicals pose to children's health. It recommends that children's health should be among the top factors that guide the interpretation of PRT data, in order to identify priorities for emissions reduction and pollution prevention.



Monitoring maternal blood for toxics and metals

With the support of the World Bank, renowned health experts in North America and the CEC Secretariat, a North American blood monitoring program of first-time mothers in Canada, Mexico and the United States was initiated by the CEC in October 2005.

Using comparable sampling and analysis methodologies across the three countries, samples from 370 mothers aged 16 to 30 were tested for toxic chemicals such as dioxins and furans, PCBs, DDT, chlordane and lindane, as well as metals like cadmium, lead and mercury.

The purpose of the study is to obtain a preliminary profile of the presence of persistent organic pollutants and metals in mothers' blood, and to develop an initial baseline value and assessment of potential environmental «hotspots» in Mexico.

It is expected that this data will provide practical information for making further decisions on priorities for risk management and future monitoring efforts, particularly in Mexico.

Persistent organic pollutants such as DDT, PCBs, lindane and chlordane may accumulate in the blood and fatty tissues and have been known to adversely affect the kidneys, liver and other organs. Small doses of these chemicals are of particular concern to unborn and small children, since their rapid development at this formative stage of their lives makes them particularly susceptible.



Watersheds added to North American Atlas

Developed by the CEC and its partners in 2004, the North American Atlas is the first comprehensive, online digital map of our continent to be updated as new information is available.

As of March 2006, it is now available with the features defining the hydrological basins, or watersheds, of our continent. The map now features the six great basins that drain into the Atlantic, Arctic, and Pacific Oceans, as well as Hudson Bay, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. Each is shown in its own color, with 17 major river basins shown in tonal variations. At the most detailed level the map presents hundreds of individual watersheds.

The CEC, Atlas of Canada, Mexico's Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, and the National Atlas of the United States continue to work together to add new information layers to the North American Atlas. The North American Atlas is available online at www.cec.org/naatlas.



Greening supply chains in Mexico

The CEC initiated a project in 2005 to support multinational corporations in fostering eco-efficiency and enhanced environmental performance on the part small and medium sized supply firms in the Mexico City region.

The first phase is now complete and the results from 28 suppliers of Colgate-Palmolive, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Janssen-Cilag and Clarion show dramatic pollution prevention, energy, materials and costs savings. Estimates include 15,300 m³/year of water savings, carbon dioxide emissions avoidance of 632.5 tons/year, savings of 112 tons of paper and cardboard/year, and general economic savings of approx US\$1 million/year.

The CEC is now approaching its partners and other large companies in Mexico to initiate activities with second-tier suppliers, diversifying industry sectors and taking into consideration lessons learned during the project's first phase.



New factual record details Tarahumara logging

In January 2006, the CEC Secretariat published its eleventh factual record—concerning alleged illegal logging in the Sierra Tarahumara mountains of western Chihuahua. The factual record responds to allegations that Mexico failed to effectively enforce its environmental law regarding natural resource extraction.

Indigenous communities in the region filed 28 citizen complaints with federal authorities between 1998 and 2000, and authorities ordered corrective measures and/or payment of fines in 16 cases. Mexico did not, however, provide the CEC Secretariat with information regarding whether corrective measures were enforced or fines paid.

For cases in which authorities determined the complaint merited pursuing criminal sanctions, Mexico did not provide the Secretariat with requested information regarding the existence or outcome of such proceedings.

With the Tarahumara factual record complete, the CEC's Submissions on Enforcement Matters unit is focusing its efforts on the development of four new factual records in addition to the five other citizen submissions currently under review.

All factual records and citizen submissions are accessible online at www.cec.org/citizen.



Study launched into green building

Commercial and residential buildings have huge environmental impacts. According to the US Green Building Council, buildings in the United States consume an estimated 65 percent of all electricity generated, 40 percent of raw materials and 30 percent of all greenhouse gas emissions.

On the other hand, buildings designed in an environmentally conscious manner represent an important opportunity to accrue environmental and economic benefits by reducing the consumption of energy and resources, as well as the generation of waste.

A new CEC study announced in February 2006, Green Building in North America: Opportunities and Challenges, will seek to encourage the growth of this important practice, by profiling the current status and prospects for green building, highlighting factors behind notable successes or difficulties, and identifying the potential for environmental benefits.

A 20-member advisory group of distinguished experts has been convened to advise the CEC Secretariat on the development of the report through to its completion in the summer of 2007.

For more information, please consult:
www.cec.org/greenbuilding.

Symposium tackles trade-environment relationship

In December 2005, the CEC hosted the third North American Symposium on Assessing the Environmental Effects of Trade as part of its ongoing analysis of the trade-environment relationship.

This time, organizers focused on the impact of investment and economic growth on the environment. Eleven papers, on topics ranging from opportunities for renewable energy development to the maquiladora electronics industry, were presented.

The CEC plans to release a document summarizing the lessons learned from this third symposium sometime this summer. It will be posted online at www.cec.org/symposium.

Conservation plans unveiled for six wildlife species

North American Conservation Action Plans (NACAPs) for the leatherback turtle, humpback whale, pink-footed shearwater, black-tailed prairie dog, ferruginous hawk, and burrowing owl were launched in November 2005, and followed up with implementation activities on the part of conservation officials.

The plans are the first of their kind: a model for trinational conservation as formulated by the governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States in cooperation with scientists, academics and environmental groups.

The goal of a NACAP is to facilitate a long-term cooperative agenda for the conservation of these species throughout their ranges in North America. The implementation of these actions, however, is incumbent on the diverse players within each country.

Each NACAP is presented in a short book form that can be downloaded from www.cec.org/nacap.

