

Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC)



Consultative Group Meeting Special Session for Tribal and Indigenous Representatives and Governments

Meeting Summary **30 November 2006** **San Diego, California**

The meeting opened with a blessing from Teodora Cuero, a Kumeyaay elder from the La Huerta community in Baja California. Doug Wright, Director of Programs at the CEC, welcomed participants and expressed interest in working more closely with tribal and indigenous communities. He noted that the Joint Public Advisory Group of CEC and others had encouraged the CEC to work more closely with tribal and indigenous communities, that CEC had been searching for methods to do so, particularly through its Pollutant Release and Transfer Register (PRTR) program. He also mentioned other CEC programs, such as the Sound Management of Chemicals (SMOC) and renewable energy programs, which also represent opportunities for indigenous involvement.

Keith Chanon, PRTR program manager, gave a presentation outlining the different types of information available from the many PRTR web sites. Information is available from national government programs, NGOs, industry and international organisations. A brief summary of the types of material available from each web site was circulated (attached). Meeting presentations are available on the CEC web site at <www.cec.org>.

Each of the three national governments demonstrated its PRTR web site, the unique aspects of the site and how an indigenous or tribal group could use it to find local information on chemical releases and transfers in their community:

- National Pollutant Release Inventory (NPRI) web site – Canada: <http://www.ec.gc.ca/pdb/npri/npri_home_e.cfm>
- Toxics Release Inventory (TRI) web site – US: <<http://www.epa.gov/tri/>>

- *Registro de Emisiones y Transferencia de Contaminantes (RETC)* web site – Mexico: <<http://app1.semarnat.gob.mx/retc/index.php>>.

Environmental Defence, a Canadian NGO, then gave a brief presentation of its Pollution Watch web site. Pollution Watch uses the US-based Scorecard organization's health and environmental information as well as the CEC's matched database to present Canadian PRTR data and rank industries. Pollution Watch web site (Environmental Defence): <<http://www.pollutionwatch.org/>>.

Isabel Kreiner gave a demonstration of the CEC's *Taking Stock Online* web site, which features a matched database of 204 chemicals common to the United States and Canada. *TS Online* will soon feature data from Mexico as well. *Taking Stock Online* web site (CEC): <<http://www.cec.org/takingstock/>>.

Marco de la O. Miranda, Baja California delegate, *Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas (CDI)* – Mexico, gave a presentation on indigenous environmental perspectives in Mexico. CDI offers support and guidance to migrant and indigenous communities to achieve sustainable development (building schools, economic operations such as chicken farming, legal assistance, road and other infrastructure).

Javier Ceseña, president, *Instituto de Culturas Nativas de Baja California, A.C. (CUNA)* outlined the major initiatives of the organization in the areas of health, culture and sustainable development. There is an ecotourism initiative, finding projects for people that generate work and income through the use of natural materials and crafts. He noted the environmental problems of diminishing water supply and quality, lack of regulation of landfills, pesticide and fertilizer use in vineyards, and development of new hotels. Training is needed on different environmental topics and to create new studies on environmental impacts.

Carol Jorgensen, director, American Indian Environmental Office, EPA, identified grants provided by EPA to assist tribal communities to build capacity. Some of these grants have been used as seed money to assist with water, air and solid waste projects. There are a number of groups within EPA and the US government that assist with tribal communities. These include the Tribal National Caucus; the Science, Pesticide, Air, Water and Solid Waste Councils; and the Inter-Agency Tribal Group. Carol noted that 31 tribes now have their own water quality standards. She also announced that EPA and Health Canada will convene a planning meeting in early 2007 to organize an indigenous conference.

In the discussions throughout the day, several issues were presented:

- Concerns over changing diets, malnutrition, poor health and increased disease among tribal communities.
- Concerns over quantity and quality of water.
- Concerns over pesticide use and agricultural practices near reserves.
- Concerns over nearby development, maquiladoras, hotels, industrial facilities.

- Concerns over garbage/landfill/burning garbage/illegal dumping as a source of contamination.
- Frustration over attempts to learn more about landfill and illegal dumping, lack of guidance on regulatory procedures and availability of information, lack of action to address concerns.
- Fear of exposure to toxic chemicals and contamination was noted as a theme in many communities.
- Concerns over environmental impacts and lack of accountability of military facilities.
- Concerns over the cumulative impacts of emissions from many industrial facilities and not just individual effects produced by one facility.
- The difficulty in achieving environmental progress when faced with jurisdictional battles (industrial facilities on tribal lands may not be inspected/reviewed/monitored by government authorities).

Discussions identified several ways that PRTR data may be helpful to tribal communities and also identified several needs and limitations of PRTR data:

- PRTRs can provide information about industrial facilities on the reserve, or near the reserve, including releases and transfers of chemicals, enforcement history (in some cases), name and telephone number of person at facility to contact with concerns, time trends of releases and transfers, and links to health and environmental information about a particular chemical.
- The recognition that PRTR data can help answer some questions about releases and transfers from industrial facilities, but may not help to answer questions about garbage landfills, illegal dumping or agricultural practices.
- PRTR data could assist in providing information for industrial licensing hearings.
- PRTR data could help to assess regional environmental impacts and begin to add up impacts from multiple industrial facilities.
- PRTR web sites can provide background data for tribes to justify the need for grants and to investigate and monitor air problems.
- PRTR data can provide information for tribal councils and community assemblies to initiate a dialogue about environment issues.
- It can be difficult to locate tribal lands using PRTR databases. The US National Atlas (<www.nationalatlas.gov>) maps US tribal boundaries and provides links to PRTR facilities.
- It would be valuable to be able to search the national PRTR databases by the names of tribal lands and surrounding areas (not only by zip code/postal code).
- PRTRs do not necessarily include information on facilities that may be of interest to a tribe (perhaps because the facility does not meet PRTR reporting thresholds).
- The need for PRTR data to better link to information on the health affects of pollutants and the need to better understand the contribution of pollutant releases to adverse health effects.
- The need to understand which chemicals may be of concern.
- The need to understand what the PRTR numbers mean (e.g., how big are these emissions in comparison to others?).

- The need to improve the quality of PRTR data, and CEC's potential role to assist in comparing data and improving data quality which would assist tribal and indigenous communities in better understanding the data.

Keith Chanon started the discussion on suggestions for ongoing collaboration by noting that there is an opportunity to identify key environmental people in tribal organizations and local experts, to work together to develop a strategy for awareness raising and outreach; as well as the need to provide more information about chemicals and links to human health and to consider developing an environmental indigenous network across North America. Doug Wright added suggestions on encouraging training, communicating how-to lessons, inviting the indigenous representatives to talk to the CEC's Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) and to become involved in CEC environmental monitoring efforts.

In the discussion participants noted:

- The usefulness of creating new links and networks from the meetings.
- The need to understand how to partner with a university.
- The need to create a common forum, perhaps with a user list or community portal
- The request for CEC to coordinate an indigenous network.
- The invitation for CEC and others to attend US Tribal Council and caucus meetings
- The need for additional educational and outreach materials about PRTRs and environmental issues.
- The need to involve and identify individuals to share the environmental information including elders, youth, women's groups, spiritual leaders.
- The potential to create a workshop on PRTRs for indigenous and tribal communities.
- The ability to highlight PRTRs at regional indigenous and tribal meetings.
- To host a web conference on PRTRs.

Rosa Maria Armendariz Muñoz, Secretary General and president, Central Region, *Confederación Nacional Campesina de Indígenas y Productores Rurales, A.C.*, offered to share CEC information on PRTRs with the Chiefs in Mexico, and was interested in working together across North America. Nina Hapner offered to host a regional meeting or workshop on PRTRs and to consider building PRTRs into other existing indigenous meetings.

Keith Chanon thanked all of the participants for their contributions and willingness to share information. He noted that the CEC will consider all of the issues raised throughout the meeting and will continue to engage indigenous communities across North America. He also invited the participants to maintain contact with each other and to continue to build the network across the three countries and to submit any additional ideas to the CEC.

The meeting presentations are available on the CEC web site at: <www.cec.org>.

Annex A: List of participants



*Special Session for Tribal and Indigenous Representatives
and Governments*

*Sesión Especial Para Representantes de Comunidades
y Autóctonas y Gobiernos*

**San Diego, California, United States
30 November 2006**

Provisional list of Participants / Lista provisional de participantes

30-11-06

Please inform the Secretariat of any mistake or missing name
Favor de informar al Secretariado de cualquier error u omisión

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