

Border 2012 Summary of Comments

Border 2012
Undergraduate Learning Center
UTEP
El Paso, TX.

Welcome and Introductions – Carlos Rivera – moderator
Please sign in at sign-in table. Make sure you got a Border 2012 document and an agenda.

Agenda review.

Introductions and brief comments –
Bill Luthans-El Paso Border Office
Gina Weber- EPA Region 6 Dallas
Alma Figueroa- Director of Ecology – Juárez
Daniel Chacon- PROFEPA
Magarita Palaflox- SEMARNAT
Gedi Cibas- EPA, Santa Fe Office
Jorge Castillo- TCEQ

VIDEO

Regional Workgroup Next Steps and Issues – Jorge Castillo TCEQ
Gedi Cibas- This is the last meeting of the public comment period. Public comments will be accepted until Nov. 22. Regional workgroups will convene. A few agreements need to be signed. Names on sign-in sheets will be contacted re: regional workgroup meetings. Regional environmental issues – identified by you tonight and through regional workgroups. Prioritize those issues.

QUESTIONS/ANSWERS

Luis Sarinana – El Paso City Council – Cd. Juarez WWTP -- \$30 million invested; causing problems in El Paso and Juarez. People's health being affected by odors coming from WWTP. Need to find a way to correct the problem. It's a health issue. We have been over the JMAS 3 – 4 times and they say that it is a federal issue. Here to express my desire to resolve the problem. There are maggots and worms and we need to deal with them. We gathered 1,200 signatures on a petition to resolve issue. Please try to do something.

BREAK

PUBLIC COMMENT

Chief Rivera – border 2012 emphasized the need for Emergency contingency Planning. This region is characterized by a significant movement of hazardous wastes/chemicals. Binational coordination is critical. Emergency planning agencies need to know what resources are available, who will be in charge of coordination who will be the stakeholders. We need to work out details such as life insurance policies coverage (death on the line of duty). Need a plan. Equipment transfer agreements. What are the resources and risks in Juarez. What are the resources that we need. Who is going to help us in Juarez. My proposal is to finish developing the Binational contingency plan; who will make the call? Federal, state or local to activate such plan? Working on other issues as well. Need something in place before an incident happens.

Jacob Mousoud – Ysleta del Sur Pueblo – Thanks for inviting me. Air quality is a concern to pueblo. Rio Grande is also a major issue. Our community has concerns about odor from sewage treatment plant in Juarez as well. We are also concerned about other types of environmental issues such as: flow with canalization project, urban runoff, particulate matter, river pollution, water quality, illegal dumping, we have a polluted environment. We recognize the different legal status of tribes in the US and in Mexico. We would support concerns of Indian tribes in Mexico. Need to get the Mexican indigenous peoples involved.

David Lara and entourage – concern in the lower valley with WWTP on the Mexican side. It impacts our neighborhoods located in Riverside, Ysleta High, Yarbrough, Alvin Way, Zaragoza etc. Construction built in 1998-99 with NADB money. Main concern is health. Property values going down. We have taken our concerns to many different agencies in the US, they tell us there is nothing they can do. This plant is a Binational project paid for by Binational funding sources which include US agencies such as EPA; we need a Binational solution.

Question—do they have the latest technologies? Are they removing the sludges?

Ma. Elena Cruz - This is not a selfish issue it affects several thousand residents. The smell is overpowering, I am talking about a raw sewage stench. WWTP affects the health of the community. What can I do to help? I will serve on solid waste task force to solve problem. Air is for everyone. Horrific overpowering sewage smell.

Elisa Lara – concerns the same. It's for our health. The smell is overpowering especially in the mornings and evenings. We walk covering our noses. We do not want promises on paper, we want solutions. People are nauseated; people can't be outside. We want action.

Sra. Roque- Reading of a lengthy document which includes:

Public participation, EPA should provide outreach to community centers.

Pesticides are affecting our health. Program doesn't identify the pollution from agriculture or industry.

Do you have budgets for these items? Need to address bridge congestion; they are a major source of pollution.

Why doesn't program mention WIPP? The communities are not made aware of the risks associated with these types of facilities. Site is insecure.

Need more coordination.

Sewage waters in Midway area petition sent to Silvester Reyes (congress man) and Carlos Rivera from IBWC.

Antonio Valenzuela – I also live in this area of the sewage stench, I have two grand kids, they have asthma, the doctor says something is triggering this. What is it? I am a tax payer, I refuse to live in third world conditions. I see haze at downtown. Air pollution is so bad. Can EPA do something about this? Cars are delayed longer on the bridges. I understand national security is important but can we do something?

Bob Currey – I have Program related comments:

Focus of program – purpose is framework for environmental cooperation, but looks more like a framework for EPA/SEMARNAT cooperation.

Agriculture and others are on the edge we need to work with the department of Energy and the Department of Agriculture and others to make sure these issues are adequately addressed.

Regional work groups have limitations. Our regional work groups may be limited by Texas participation in two work groups. Texas might spend all of its resources in the other regional group and overlook Texas, New Mexico and Chihuahua.

Industry participation is missing.

Will regional workgroups be free to work with whatever agency or organization that they may need to work with?

How do you get an active, informed public and have dialogue instead of diatribe?

Getting the work done between the meetings of taskforces and workgroups is important.

Meeting every ninety days is too long.

What are the resources (not mentioned in plan at all.) Need infrastructure that will ensure that program will succeed.

There is n budget in the plan.

Ana Loya-UTEP Student – Student Environmental Group Association, both n UTEP and at the UACJ – At UTEP we work with a community group in river clean ups. We are involved in Rio Bosque. We are 100 students that are ready to get involved and participate and help.

CLOSING REMARKS from panelists:

Magarita Palaflox –We have identified comments that will help us fine tune the draft document. With these comments and comments from Juarez we will work towards finalizing the document. Items such as energy are very important. We need to work together with groups such as the Ten States. SEMARNAT needs to provide responses to some issues identified over the last two days in Juarez and El Paso.

Daniel Chacon – There are many subjects that we will need to address. Tires, ASARCO. We invite your participation in finding together, solutions to these problems.

Alma Leticia Figueroa – We are faced with urgent problems. Odors, tires, ASARCO, hazardous waste. We hope that everyone participates.

Gedi Cibas – This Program will provide a framework to systematically address environmental problems. Costs, impacts. It is a new program. Without your input is not going to be possible to get far at all. The complexity is immense, so to address all the problems we have to start working together at a local perspective. Thank you for being here.

Jorge Castillo – Thank you for coming. There is an interesting comment from the UTEP student saying she has a group of a hundred students from UTEP and the University of Juarez they are willing to work on community projects, they want to get involved and they want not to be forgotten when some of the local groups need help in whatever it is that they are that we need to develop results and that with some of the comments here we will be able to finish up the draft document. More importantly, we have a starting point to begin the task forces and to develop solutions and work together as best we can. Daniel Chacon and Alma Leticia also mentioned the need to work together as a community but also there were a lot of issues that were not mentioned, including the big issue of tires and soil contamination. I thank you for coming and encourage you, if you did not submit comments be sure to submit them by the end of the week, the deadline is on November 22, thank you.

Gina Weber – Thank you for coming and giving us your comments. We not only listen to you when we have public meetings, you can continue to work with us in different issues. You know we are a Border Office, so you can visit and we can deal with certain issues that were forgotten tonight. It is not a deadline for you to continue working with us. Please take the responsibility to continue to working with us and through our border office and state agencies. Real work will begin in the regional workgroups and taskforces. I appreciate your coming and we hope you continue to talk to us after this public meeting. I really appreciate your comments, I know we have a lot of difficult issues ahead, hopefully with your help we can prioritize them. Thank you.

Carlos – Thank you, UTEP/CERM and Alberto Barud for sponsoring us tonight. Thanks to all of you for taking the time of being with this evening, thank you for participating. As we mentioned repeatedly your involvement is important in resolving this 2012 document and please remember that the final shape of this document is really in your hands. We want to continue our communication with you. Remember, if you did not make a public comment this evening you are welcome to submit comments in writing by regular mail or fax, you will find EPA and SEMARNAT's address in the hand outs, feel free to comment. Thank you for coming and we look forward to seeing you again for this Border 2012 program.

