

Border 2012 Summary of Comments

Border 2012: U.S.-Mexico Environmental Program Public Meeting

Nogales, Arizona

**October 29, 2002
6:00 p.m.
Minutes**

I. Welcome/Introductions
Tomas Torres, EPA

Tomas Torres welcomed attendees and opened the meeting. Mr. Torres gave an overview of the public comment process and stressed the importance of public participation, and reviewed the agenda.

Marco A. Lopez, Mayor of Nogales, welcomed attendees and highlighted the importance of addressing environmental health issues in the border region.

Tomas Torres introduced the regional leadership present.

II. Introductions and Opening Remarks
EPA, Laura Yoshii
ADEQ, David Esposito

Laura Yoshii also welcomed attendees and thanked them for their attendance and for their comments. Laura Yoshii highlighted the important changes incorporated into the new plan, including the decentralization of activities, the new structure that provides for closer ties between federal, state, and local actors, measurable goals, transparency, and public participation. Ms. Yoshii introduced Region 9 staff present.

David Esposito also welcomed participants and thanked regional leadership for their support. He introduced ADEQ staff present. Mr. Esposito expressed appreciation for the decentralization of the new plan and the regional focus of the plan, which will emphasize local leadership.

III. Draft Border Plan Presentation

Border 2012 video was shown up to the structure of the program. Due to technical difficulties, Tomas Torres finished the presentation orally from that point.

IV. Arizona/Sonora Regional Issues Presentation and Ambos Nogales
Placido dos Santos, ADEQ

Placido dos Santos gave an overview of regional issues. Some are currently being addressed and some not. All may be included in the new program.

San Luis area issues include:

Air quality issues related to particulate matter, dust, agricultural burns, new power plants on the Mexico side of the border.

Emergency preparedness. All four-sister cities in the Arizona/Sonora region have mutual assistance agreements for emergencies.

Hazardous waste shipments. San Luis is a port of entry for many shipments.

Tribal land issues include:

Illegal dumping of solid waste, especially that left behind by undocumented immigrants.

Transportation of hazardous cargo.

Air and water quality concerns, including water quality south of the border, close to mining facilities in Mexico.

Emergency response training.

Southeast Arizona and Northeast Sonora issues:

Air and water quality. ADEQ is now halfway through a five-year study. Dust is of prime concern. The main source is unpaved roads. Sewage flows from Naco to Arizona. There have been dramatic improvements, but more infrastructure improvements are needed.

Solid waste dumping by undocumented immigrants.

Naco has a great need for a landfill. This can help prevent air quality problems caused by trash burning, and dump fire.

Emergency preparedness. There was a coordinated response in Naco, Sonora last year when the dump caught fire. Naco, Sonora and Cochise County later signed a cooperative agreement.

Ambos Nogales issues: Air and water quality. Waste water infrastructure. There are problems with sewage flows due to insufficiency of infrastructure. A five-year study has been completed. There is a binational dialogue underway on the basis of that study. A binational plan will soon be released. This plan was developed by both governments to improve air quality on both sides of the border. The important issues are unpaved roads, vehicular emissions and others. There have been wastewater management coordination efforts in this area for some time.

Emergency preparedness. There is an existing mutual assistance plan, but there is always more to do.

This plan requires local leadership. The affected communities best know what the issues are and often best know their sister communities. It is regional and local effort that is most likely to be able to bring change in the environmental conditions in the border region over the next ten years.

V. Question and Answer Session on Presentations

1. Speaker one: I notice there is a lot of mention of local communities. I wonder how much responsibility is going to fall to local communities for funding and implementation. Many border communities are already overloaded. My second concern is that there are already many federal agencies working on these issues, but I don't see representation here. IBWC, for example, is responsible for a new wastewater plant in a hazardous area near the conjunction of several rivers. They are one of the major stakeholders, but they're not here. I wonder if this could become a power play between federal agencies and a way of passing the buck by narrowly defining different areas of operation.

Placido dos Santos: With regard to your concern about implementation being left to local communities: when the regional aspects of this program were conceived, it was not with the intent to leave communities with the responsibility for implementation. There are existing resources for environmental issues in the border region. Those resources should be directed according to local priorities. That is the consensus among the states. We want to make sure that the response is carried out according to the priorities of the local communities. There should be a direct relationship between the task forces that are formed and the channeling of resources.

With regard to your comment about the IBWC: those present are representative of the environmental agencies responsible for these matters along the border. The IBWC has a unique function in the area of water. There is a representative of the IBWC here. They will be involved.

Laura Yoshii: You raise a good point regarding resource needs at the local level. We will definitely be attempting to get resources to local communities. Regarding coordination with the IBWC: we will be coordinating with them at the regional level. We envision a completely cooperative working relationship.

2. Mike, University of Arizona: I appreciate that this is a regional group, but it's unclear how that will work. The prior plan had more evidence of national figures involved. Federal players should also be involved in discussions at the local level so there is good coordination and local efforts can use what has already been done at the federal level in terms of information gathering, etc.

Laura Yoshii: With regard to ensuring coordination between regional groups and the national level. I think the video broke down before we got to the national policy forum part of the structure. In the initial discussions, the work of those national policy groups will be driven by the work at the regional level. There will be opportunities to invite national representatives to task force sessions or regional sessions when policy issues need to be addressed. There is an emphasis on the identification of policy issues that must be resolved for change on the ground to take place.

Robert Varady, Udall Center: I did not find DOI in the report. Is DOI not fully participating?

Laura Yoshii: That is an important distinction. There was much discussion about including natural resources issues. DOI made a conscious decision not to participate in the program because they feel they have separate and ongoing relationships with their counterparts in Mexico on these issues. However, there are also natural resource issues that can and should be addressed in the regional work groups and task forces. For that reason, we have continued to be in contact with DOI and will invite them to participate to coordinate and share information.

3. Michael Alcala, U.S. Public Health Service: I have followed environmental health issues. I am familiar with Border 21 and the efforts in Nogales related to it. We often hear the comment that there are several federal agencies working on the border and they do not know what the others are doing. I think border 2012 is in a good position to be that hub to develop strong relationships between federal agencies. There are at least nine federal agencies working on the border. We can be sharing information. I would like to challenge you to include that recommendation in future projects. Some local examples include: Federal funds were used in part for a water program carried out between federal, state and local government agencies and non-governmental actors. Six hundred families were taught how to protect their portable water. Another example is the Amigo project to share environmental technology between industries on both sides of the border. This also created ties between those who are interested in environmental technologies on both sides of the border. Another is the current BLM air quality project. These are a few examples of partnerships.

Laura Yoshii: Thank you for the suggestion. It is a good one. It is a challenge to remain aware of what other are doing and coordinate, share information and leverage resources. I serve on the Region 9 Federal Regional Council and I have shared information on Border 2012 at that level.

4. Billy Gilmore, local educator: I would like to see more information publicized. There was a very small article in Friday's paper. I would like to see more publicity and I would encourage you to use the schools. Many are including environmental education programs. I am involved in environmental education and I would be happy to help provide information to parents and others. Information can also be distributed through Rotary clubs and others.

Laura Yoshii: We welcome all ideas on how to improve outreach.

Lorena Lopez Powers reminded everyone to sign in and emphasized that those who sign in do receive information by mail.

VI. Break

VII. Public Comment Period

Tomas Torres opened the public comment period by inviting comments and questions and making attendees aware of the fact that a comment and response document will be published.

1. Gina Romero: I have a comment and question regarding community involvement and awareness. You used to have an air quality column in The International. It sparked a lot of discussion and got information out. Will it be resumed?

Response: It will be restarting.

2. Ben Lomeli: I am a hydrologist, a native, and member of Friends of the Santa Cruz River. I would like to see more emphasis on the degradation of watershed conditions. This has an effect on the environment, especially when it leads to riparian losses and losses of habitat.

Tomas Torres reminded participants that written comments could be submitted until November 22.

VIII. Closing

EPA, Laura Yoshii
ADEQ, David Esposito

Laura Yoshii thanked participants for attending and encouraged them to stay engaged in the process.

David Esposito thanked participants for attending and invited more comments to ADEQ or EPA before November 22, 2002.

There being no additional comments or questions, the meeting was concluded at 8:05 p.m.