

**Report of the Contingency Planning and Emergency Response (CPER) Workgroup
Report for the U.S./Mexico National Coordinators
September 21, 2000
El Paso, Texas**

It is with great satisfaction that the members of this working group want to share with all of you the accomplishments from May 1999 to September of this year, because they represent great strides in chemical accident prevention, preparedness and response.

In the first place we have the modification and signing of Annex II of the La Paz Agreement on June 4, 1999. This modification will allow cross border response to incidents involving dangerous substances. Before the changes were implemented on Annex II, border crossings for a joint response were not allowed. The revised Annex II allows each country, when requested by the other, to provide assistance and resources to mitigate the effects of a chemical accident along the border.

On the same day, the newly revised U.S./Mexico Joint Contingency Plan (JCP) was signed by the environmental representatives from both countries. This new JCP has been reviewed and modified by the U.S./Mexico Joint Response Team and reflects the institutional and legislative changes that have occurred since the original JCP was signed in 1988. The JCP changes are relevant in particular to the notification systems used between both countries, to ensure timely notification when a chemical accident happens on the border area and to expedite the response actions.

In the area of Joint Contingency Plans between Sister Cities, three additional plans were signed, between the cities of:

San Luis, Arizona and San Luis Río Colorado, Sonora;
Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora; and
McAllen, Texas and Reynosa, Tamaulipas.

That together with the three plans previously signed make a total of six pairs of sister cities that have in place contingency plans. The other three plans include:

Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass (March 25, 1998);
Matamoros and Brownsville (May 6, 1997); and
Laredo and Nuevo Laredo (December 21, 1998).

In September of 1999, a meeting of the Joint Response Team was held in Guanajuato with the participation of over 60 people representing both countries. During this meeting the Joint Contingency Plan signed by both countries was presented; the Joint Plans for the Sister Cities in existence and under development were introduced as well as the promotion of the creation of such plans by means of technical assistance workshops; strategies were proposed to hold exercises addressing the JCP notification procedures and local responses to chemical emergencies; the importance of the use of CAMEO as a tool to prevent and/or manage emergencies; the environmental indicators that are being implemented by this

workgroup; and discussed the potential problems caused by the year 2000 clock change (Y2K).

Upcoming Activities

On September 29, 2000, a binational emergency response exercise will be carried out between the Sister Cities of Matamoros and Brownsville using the framework of the Sister City plan and the Joint Contingency Plan. Representatives from response agencies in both countries will be participating in the exercise. The objective of the exercise are to: evaluate the response plan for the sister cities, verify the organization and communications between the various response organizations, and to make the public authorities and public aware of the Sister City contingency plan.

Short-term goals

The short term goals of the Contingency planning and Emergency Response Workgroup include:

- Continue to work with Sister City to assist them in developing Sister City contingency plans.
- Exercise the existing Sister City contingency plans.
- Exercise the notification procedures in the JCP from both sides of the border.
- Analyze the environmental indicators information and revise the indicators based on the available information.
- Identify high risk facilities and areas along the border.
- Inventory tire pile sites and begin development of a strategy for tire fire prevention.
- Establish State to State relationships (or “Sister States”) to support the Sister Cities and encourage border states to work together in the area of contingency planning and emergency response.
- Continue to promote workshops and training seminars for qualification of the personnel that work on emergencies.
- Spread the activities of the workgroup to all organizations that participate in chemical emergency preparedness and response and protect the public from chemical accidents in the border area.

Goals for the future

As the next binational border program is developed, there are several objectives on which the Workgroup on Contingency Planning and Emergency Response will focus and several challenges to be faced. In the future, the Workgroup must continue to focus on promoting the creation of Sister City plans as well as ensure the viability of existing Sister City plans. The Workgroup should also encourage the sharing and transmitting of the experiences among Sister Cities to assist in developing and continuously revising the Sister City contingency plans. Additionally, the Workgroup should support the border Sister Cities' capabilities to increase chemical safety and reduce risks. With regards to the Workgroup itself, the members must strive to ensure their efforts are vital and operationally oriented. The Workgroup must continue to implement the JCP ensuring the notification procedures are effective and efficient and resources are available for emergency response efforts. Communication and collaboration of U.S. and Mexican partners at the federal, state, and local level must be improved. The involvement of federal partners, other than the environmental agencies, and industry should be increased. One federal partner which must be encouraged to support border chemical accident preparedness and response is the Custom Agencies for both countries. Transportation of hazardous substances across the border and new transportation routes which pose additional chemical risks to the community are other areas which must be incorporated into the border planning and prevention programs. Finally, the Workgroup should work to ensure valid and useful information on border chemical risks and resources is collected and analyzed. Thus, the Workgroups environmental indicators will show the successes and gaps in the border contingency planning and emergency response efforts.

Annex

State and Local Activities

Representatives from different border states in Mexico presented reports about the activities completed since the last National Coordinators meeting, emphasizing the qualification of personnel in both countries, the training exercises and the exchange of technical assistance as follows:

Baja California:

- Qualification in the use of response equipment for petroleum spills in the ocean.
- Exercises involving the release of ammonia with fire in Ensenada and Mexicali.
- Emergencies involving cryogenic fluids.
- Bilateral project to evaluate computer programs and databases.
- Handling of hazardous materials and wastes.

Sonora:

- Signing of the joint local contingency plans in Nogales/Nogales and San Luis/San Luis Rio Colorado.
- Courses on fire fighting and prevention, handling of sulfuric acid, spills, CAMEO, response operations on railroads.
- ACLS refresher for hazardous materials.
- Exams required to become HAZMAT instructor.
- Exercises involving evacuations for chemical substances and fires.
- Training of firefighters held in Abonadle, California.

Chihuahua:

- Municipal forum in High Risk Management.
- Notification exercises.

Coahuila:

- Workshop on import/export of hazardous materials and waste.

N.L.:

- Event involving the handling of hazardous materials.
- Evacuation exercises.

Tamaulipas:

- Signing of the local joint contingency plan in Reynosa, Tamaulipas/McAllen, Texas.
- Use of atmospheric models for the simulation of contamination and risks in industries.
- Planning, development, and evaluation of exercises simulating chemical incidents.
- Medical services needed for hazardous materials events.
- Identification, handling, and management of hazardous materials.
- Personal protection equipment levels.
- First on scene.
- Regulations covering the ground transportation of hazardous materials and waste.
- National System for Civil Protection.