

US EPA ARCHIVE DOCUMENT

Minutes of the Air Quality Task Force Meeting

Mexicali/Imperial

March 6th, 2013

Calexico

Co-chairs: Luis Alberto Ocampo; Reyes Romero

Attendance:

Raul Tovar, Baja California Secretariat of Environmental Protection; Reyes Romero, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District; Tania Rodriguez, Baja California Secretariat of Environmental Protection; Maria de los Angeles Alvarez, SEMARNAT; Arturo Jimenez Trejo; Secretariat of Agricultural Development; Juan Serrato; CESP^M, Claudia Cisterna, "Voz de la Frontera" Newspaper; Ray Askins, environmentalist; Michael Shore, UABC Engineering Institute; Belen Leon, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District; Carlos Angulo, CAL-EPA; Luis Olmedo, Comité Cívico

I. Welcome and Initial Comments

Reyes Romero welcomed everyone and thanked them for taking time from their busy agendas to attend this meeting. He also introduced Raul Tovar, who was attending on behalf of Efrain Nieblas.

II. Review of Minutes from Prior Meeting

Reyes Romero asked if anyone had any comments or suggestions for changes on the minutes. No one had any comments or suggestions, so the minutes were approved.

III. Presentations; questions and answers

History of Mexican Environmental Legislation Regarding Air Pollution and Environmental Impacts;
Juan Serrato

Luis Olmedo asked if at a state level a proposal to make a straw, ammonia and water compost, or any other alternatives had already been made regarding agricultural waste

Juan Serrato pointed out that the idea of doing compost with straw wheat was a good one, and that it was already being used in agricultural places and for example San Quintin was recommended for agriculture and livestock feed. However, he mentioned that techniques such as this had a cost that would be reflected on the product and therefore farmers would rather burn their fields. He said they should work on a project or a specific norm on which the government would offer incentives so that the farmers would be willing to use alternative options. He mentioned that they also needed a mechanism in charge of enforcing this norm. He finished adding that it was also important to make the farmers aware of the impact that agricultural burnings have on the environment as well as on human health.

Ray Askins said that he feels that the government talks about coming up with solutions for environmental problems, but they don't take the action needed to do so. He also said he would like to see some steps taken aiming to resolve these problems. He finished asking Juan Serrato what his opinion was on this matter.

Juan Serrato said that he would focus on the subject that he was familiar with which was water, and mentioned that there were different ways to kill bacteria in water, and the most efficient one was through

the use of chlorine and is preferred as it has a residual effect. However, he explained that chlorine is of a high risk use, and that handling it required a lot of safety measures. The use of chlorine cleans the water, but pollutes the air. He added that their work was also affected by the population's lack of water and service payment because there is not a culture of caring for water and for water payments. Because of all this, some norms and regulations are not met, but they are doing a huge effort to bring water service to the community, lower the environmental impact, and comply with the current norms and regulations.

Reyes Romero said that with regards to agricultural burnings, the problem they were facing in the United States was that the state law gives the farmers the right to burn. He explained that the county's task was to regulate these burnings, but that they didn't have the authority to prohibit them. For this reason in his opinion, they should work with the state law because as long as this law doesn't change, the county will continue to have its hands tied on this matter. He mentioned that he was under the understanding that according to Mexican laws, agricultural burning was prohibited, and he asked if this was true.

Juan Serrato explained that he was referring to the 1971 laws, not the current ones. However, he mentioned that later during his presentation, he would refer to the current laws.

Ray Askins asked how much cooperation the water utility gets from SEMARNAT to enforce the laws.

Juan Serrato said that SEMARNAT does not cooperate with CESPUM, but that it supervises them on complying with the norms and regulations. He mentioned that SEMARNAT inspected the water utility (CESPUM) on the management of 9 different types of toxic waste.

Reyes Romero said that what they were asking was if on the case of any company's lack of compliance with any norm, such as in the Cerro Prieto case, the state had any authority to do something about it, or if they had to go to a federal authority to file a complaint.

Maria de los Angeles Alvarez said that the complaint could be submitted locally through the Secretariat of Environmental Protection, and that depending on the results found after inspection, it might be necessary to bring specialized personnel at a federal level from Mexico City to verify that they met the norm. She added that in the case of the geothermal facility, all of its managing plans as well as its authorizations go to Mexico City, and are analyzed there.

Ray Askins mentioned that the military burn the drugs that they confiscate and pollute the air by doing so, and asked what could be done about it because in his opinion that was a serious problem.

Juan Serrato explained that the federation makes different burnings which are not allowed, but that no other authority can do anything about it.

Luis Olmedo thanked him for his presentation and said that he has seen projects through which they have managed to reduce carbon monoxide emissions at cross roads where the traffic flow is high. He said that these could be models to follow for those government agencies interested on reducing this problem. He added that regarding the burnings, it was very important to keep task forces such as this one to make the community aware of the problem, and through them pressure the government to create norms and regulations for agricultural burning, thus reducing air pollution.

Juan Serrato mentioned that farmers should propose, and authorities should listen and take action.

Maria de los Angeles Alvarez said that in her opinion, the historical tour that they had been on through this presentation was very interesting, but that she would like to mention that there are forums on which they have been working to change these norms. She mentioned that SEMARNAT, as a federal instrument, had just updated the Pro Aires together with authorities from the different government levels, and said that on these forums laws and instruments that can be applied to solve these kinds of problems are being analyzed. She also mentioned that the Pro Aires for the metropolitan areas in Tijuana and Mexicali had been updated, and that the Baja California Secretariat of Environmental Protection was carrying out the Attention to Climate Change State Program through federal resources. She said that a group of experts from the local universities were working on defining mitigation actions through this program. She also mentioned that they were hosting a workshop which was part of the Fifth Mexican Statement on Climate Change, which was the reason why Mr. Ocampo could not attend this meeting. Finally, she said that in her

opinion, they were all aware of how important this zone was, and that work was being done to advance on the matter of environmental protection.

Michael Shore said that he would like to point out that the Mexican legislation was not updated on modern science and technology. He said that humanity today faces three central problems which are environmental quality, clean energy, and water shortage. With regards to agricultural burning, he said that technology was already very advanced and offered other alternatives that had not been mentioned on the presentation, which led him to believe that legislators and whoever regulates these kinds of practices in Mexico are behind on science and technology. He mentioned that in the United States, President Obama had private scientific consultants to help the agencies or authorities in charge of these matters, and that he wasn't sure, but didn't think Mexico had something similar. He said that agricultural burning was no longer necessary because there is a new technology called bio-fuel through which agricultural waste can be turned into methane gas that can be used to produce electricity. He also said that there are modern biocides, and all kinds of biodegradable proteins to eliminate air pollutants such as H₂S and CO₂, which are natural gasses produced by the oil industry, as well as new pollutants such as sulfur, nitrogen, and carbon gasses produced by thermoelectric companies. He invited them to go to UABC Mexicali, where they have personnel that know about these matters, and would be willing to cooperate with any necessary activities.

Ray Askins said that he agreed with doctor Shore and that in his opinion they needed to take the power out of the hands of the companies setting the norms because they only have self interest in doing so.

Carlos Angulo said to be aware of the problem, and that being able to have the will and the necessary infrastructure could only be accomplished through projects and goals. He mentioned that as far as tire burning was concerned, they were currently working on a proposal so that all the funds from recycling in California, which sells tires to Baja California, would be regulated. He said to have already met with Congress men to promote a law initiative through which a bank in California could exist to help the border through percentage and lost funds. He said that this funds together with what was already being charged in Mexico for recycling tires would be a part of a complete amount to be able to start a tire recycling program. He mentioned that it was a program that they were still working on, but that the will existed. He took this time to ask the Secretariat of Environmental Protection for the last air quality monitoring in Mexico. He also took the opportunity to mention that SEMARNAT already had the Chemistry Noble Prize working for them for consulting purposes. He finished saying that the current governor was promoting the adapting protocols, which meant that the California Climate Change Registry with the organization of all the west governments, including Canada and other countries of the world, gave authorization to California to buy carbon bonuses. He said that Baja California would receive carbon bonuses as long as all its projects were certified and approved.

Maria de los Angeles Alvarez said that in her opinion, the most important thing to do was to focus on the objective that this task force has. She offered to give a presentation on the Pro Aire for this zone on the next meeting. She mentioned that SEMARNAT had signed an agreement with CFE at Cerro Prieto so that by 2016, they will have already changed their production method completely.

Luis Olmedo said that it was important to watch for the environmental impact that some state policies that are being proposed may have. He mentioned that some zones for economical development were currently being proposed in California. He said these policies promote economical growth, but that environmental protection would be affected by them. He said that Legislators and Senators interested on reviewing these policies could access to them through the leginfo.gov website.

IV. Updates on Border 2020 Program, Dave Fege

Reyes Romero informed that there were no updates to give because unfortunately Dave Fege had not been able to show up to the meeting due to health problems.

V. Project Updates on Federal, State, and Local Governments, Reyes Romero

Reyes Romero said that at the Imperial Valley, they were working on reviewing two of the most important regulations for industrial plants in the Imperial Valley. These regulations have the objective to require that

all industrial plants to emit more than 25 pounds of pollutants under unattainment with the regulation per day, be supervised to make sure they are using the best available technology in their premises. Also, all those to emit over 137 pounds of pollutants under unattainment with the regulation per day, will have to offset their emissions by reducing emissions from another pollutant source. He mentioned that they were currently working with EPA so that these rules were included in their State Implementation Plan, and that they would be having meetings to which they were all invited so that they could give their comments on the matter. He said that the drafts on these regulations were available on their webpage at imperialcounty.net for those interested in reading them.

Luis Olmedo extended an invitation for all in attendance at the meeting to participate at the planning table, or as speakers at the Fifth Environmental Leadership Summit that will focus on the Laguna Salada, as well as on the border area infrastructure, which will be held in Calexico on April 26th, tentatively.

VI. Wrap Up / Date for next meeting

Belen Leon said that the next meeting would be held on June 13th, at the UABC in Mexicali, and Reyes Romero thanked everybody for attending this meeting, and said to be looking forward to seeing them at their next meeting.

Meeting Adjourned.