

[Border 2012 Summary of Comments](#)

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

Senior Center
790 Juan Sanchez Blvd.
San Luis, AZ 85349

**October 21, 2002
6:00 p.m.
Minutes**

I. Welcome/Introductions
EPA & ADEQ Representatives

Lorena Lopez Powers welcomed attendees.

Plácido DosSantos welcomed attendees and highlighted the regional focus incorporated into the Border 2012 plan.

Plácido DosSantos: The regional focus was proposed by the ten border states. Border 21 was made up of work groups composed of federal agencies. We are now proposing that the leadership come from local communities. Local communities and local people are most capable of effecting change, with support from the federal government. This document is the result of extensive discussions over a long period of time among the ten border states. This is a great approach: local leadership for implementation of projects at the local level.

Copies of the Border Plan were made available.

Attendees introduced themselves.

Lorena Lopez Powers stressed the importance of public participation and the opportunity for public participation offered by an extensive series of public meetings.

II. Draft Border Plan Presentation Outline
EPA Representative, Mike Montgomery

Other partners include the Department of Health and Human Services in the area of environmental health, as well as SEMARNAT and state agencies in Mexico.

Mike Montgomery presented an outline of the plan, and stressed it is still early in the planning process and there is a great need and desire for public input as to local needs from the perspective of people in the border region.

Background on federal government's involvement in border planning: The border is 2000 miles from one end to other. The region is defined as 100 kilometers on either side of the border. There are four border states on the US side and six on the Mexico side. The main factor motivating border planning is the very high level of population growth in the border region in recent years, particularly since the 1980s. Population growth has driven environmental needs and impacts over the last ten to twenty years. Growth is projected to continue.

There have been four primary areas of impact and focus:

Water/waste water infrastructure

Poor air quality

Improper management of hazardous and solid wastes/ pesticides

Risk of chemical accidents

This population growth and the resulting environmental problems have resulted in higher rates of environmental health problems in the border region. One example is a much higher rate of asthma among children in the border region compared to those outside the border region.

The history of the binational relationship in relation to environmental issues and coordination goes back to the La Paz agreement. Border 21 is the most recent agreement.

The two federal agencies made a commitment to develop a new border plan about a year ago.

Focus of Border 21:

Water/waste water infrastructure

Water quality

Air quality

Hazardous and solid wastes/ pesticides.

Chemical preparedness

Natural resources

Environmental health

Environmental education

The new approach that characterizes the Border 2012 plan is that it incorporates direct leadership from states in regional work groups. There is also a change in focus from a format in which groups focused on issues, to one in which work groups focus on geographic areas. We hope this will provide greater opportunities for local participation, as well as for discussion of priorities at the regional level. This will provide feedback to the federal government for use in guiding funding and policy decisions.

The mission has been changed to reflect the partnership between federal, state and local levels, and the objective of producing measurable environmental benefits in a sustainable way, i.e., measurable improvement in environmental quality.

Emphasis:

Ten year period (longer time to develop projects with lasting, long term impact).

Task forces formed and led by local leadership, state, federal. Increased local participation.

Natural resources: focus on results, measurable improvement

On the basis of the above new focus, the following five goals have been identified:

Reduce water contamination

Reduce air pollution

Reduce land contamination

Reduce exposure, particularly children's exposure to pesticides

Reduce exposure to chemicals as result of accidental releases, etc.

Structure:

-Two national coordinators: EPA and SEMARNAT

-Four regional work groups

-Border wide work groups

-Policy forums will be convened once per year by chairs of programs to identify policy barriers and work toward removing them.

-Task forces: can be local, state, federal. Must involve all stakeholders. Open processes. Processes will be open to the full range of actors on both sides of the border.

Examples of regional issues in San Luis:

Air quality issues

Emergency response incident preparedness

Monitoring hazardous waste
Proper handling and usage of pesticides.

Extensive domestic and binational public meetings are planned.

Attendees were invited to submit comments via the web site, in writing, at this and other public meetings. Comments will be key in planning and dialogue

III. Questions and Comments

Question: When does the public comment period end?

Lorena Lopez Powers: It began September 23 and ends November 22.

Question: Is Health and Human Services the only other federal agency involved?

Mike Montgomery: HHS is the only other full federal partner. We will also coordinate with others. DOI was a signing partner on Border 21, but is not on this plan. They will coordinate on specific projects. They have six binational pilot conservation projects.

Plácido DosSantos: Natural resources were a part of the last program and DOI was one of the lead partners, but they did not work with other work groups. They did carry out initiatives with their Mexican counterparts. My agency, like the EPA, does not have natural resources responsibility. But the state has Parks and Game and Fish and they work on binational initiatives.

Question: One of the stated goals is, “to preserve and restore the natural environment.” To what condition? To it’s condition two years ago? Ten years ago? 100 years ago? What’s the standard? Who sets the standards? How are they defined? What will be the cost of this and who will pay that cost?

Mike Montgomery: There are some existing clear standards. Both the U.S. and Mexico have ambient air quality standards that are comparable. Almost all the goals have existing federal standards. That would be the objective. We could better identify the standards in the final plan so people can understand the specific objectives. With regard to resources: the U.S. government pays for the lion’s share. The water projects require a 50/50 match from Mexico. Usually in the case of infrastructure it’s 50/50. For assistance programs, the U.S. usually pays one hundred percent. An example would be development of capability to run a wastewater plant. Many projects are U.S. funded but use staff support from Mexico. To encourage Mexico’s participation we tend to bring more than 50/50 because they have a lot of competing priorities.

Question: What kind of funding will come down to the local level, such as the county level, for public outreach, for informing citizens and encouraging citizen input.

Mike Montgomery: I think it's a possibility. We have yet to establish mechanisms for identifying and funding projects. We have very limited discretionary funds for those types of needs. In region nine, for example, we get under a million dollars per year for both Arizona and Sonora for environmental projects. Some funds have to be used for existing efforts at the state level. Also for ongoing projects through community based organizations that we have funded. We want to develop project identification and funding mechanisms through work groups that will open it up to everybody: county governments, NGOs, local governments.

Follow up comment: Developing agents for change at the regional level requires funding at the local level, such as funding for positions to do outreach.

Mike Montgomery: We tend to shy away from funding positions. But if it were identified with particular projects with an emphasis on binational projects or projects with binational implications, perhaps.

Question: Regarding the HAZMAT issue/sister city plan. Might we be able to get more HAZMAT response equipment through this plan? Also, our people are well trained, but those from Mexico are not as well trained.

Plácido DosSantos: With regard to equipment, I don't think you should look to just EPA for equipment for HAZMAT needs. Other communities have had success through the governor's office, Department of Energy and others. The challenge is assembling groups of individuals with expertise to search for creative solutions. A clearinghouse system would be one example. With regard to training, when training is offered for the border region, we try to include Mexican counterparts. The trouble is interpreting. Such training may last a week or many weeks. The cost of simultaneous interpreting can be very high. So we have asked Mexico to send their bilingual people, and they have done that. But it's not the whole team. We hope they share it with others. Much more can be done. Whether it is needs for equipment, training, information, we need to establish and maintain local coordination through a task force so the two communities can be better prepared.

Mike Montgomery: Every year we have tried to send first responders to "continuing challenge" emergency response training. But we could not afford interpreting. But it may be possible to leverage superfund or other types of funds.

Plácido DosSantos: Since 9/11 the scene is totally different. We will see more resources to address security needs. It is important to have people ready to access those opportunities.

Question: I work with the local emergency planning committee. We have been looking at truck routes and have determined we have a very high volume of Hazama's through this area. I suggest working with local emergency planning committees. There's money coming down from the federal government. FEMA has a lot of money available to local jurisdictions.

Question: Is the EPA willing to address the environmental problems caused by illegal immigration? Especially in Cochise County there are big problems with trash, destruction of private property and the environment.

Mike Montgomery: Representative Kolbe passed legislation to require a report on the environmental impact of illegal immigration in Eastern Arizona. That report went to congress and identified a total need of approximately, maybe \$62 million. We would be willing to form a task force on solid waste issues. Solid waste was identified in that report. We have worked with the Border Patrol and the Tohono O'odham on grants for solid waste management/ landfills to dispose of solid waste left behind by immigrants. So we have been doing work in this area. We need to know what types of projects you would want to see.

Plácido DosSantos: I've been asking that same question and we're getting a different answer now. Illegal dumping is now viewed as a transboundary environmental issue. Before it was not viewed that way. Two weeks ago there was a binational meeting in Agua Prieta with Mexican counterparts. Someone from Agua Prieta started to complain about trash left behind in Mexico by migrants. I think it is clearly a transboundary issue. If we have a proposal from some region, such as the Cochise County government ranchers. This is also a problem on Tohono O'odham land. Creative solutions should be sought, such as working with the Department of Corrections to create work teams. The EPA is willing to explore it.

Question: When I started here five years ago, the city had money to expand the waste water treatment plant, but it took over five years to secure land from the federal government and get through the Arizona Department of Environmental Quality--so sometimes the problem is not money, but rather bureaucracy. Is there anything that can be done about that?

Plácido DosSantos: I work for the Department of Environmental Quality and we have no regulatory authority. I know we have tough permitting procedures. Two years ago legislation was passed that creates mandatory time frames for permits, etc., and penalties if we do not comply.

Lorena Lopez Powers informed attendees that a response publication will be issued.

Forms for submitting written comments were requested and promised.

IV. There being no additional comments or questions, the meeting was concluded at 7:20 p.m.