

Imperial-Mexicali Air Quality Task Force

Meeting Minutes, September 10, 2009, Mexicali

Co-Chairs: Reyes Romero, Efrain Nieblas

Attendees:

Reyes Romero, Imperial Valley Air Pollution Control District; David Fege, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in San Diego; Rodolfo Castro, Engineering in Environmental Control; Arturo Lopez Ortiz, State Government Secretariat of Economic Developing; Rosa Lopez, Imperial Valley Association of Governments; Belen León, Imperial County Air Pollution Control District; Marissa, Refrigerants Recycling Center; Efrain Nieblas, Secretariat of Environmental Protection in Baja California; Ray Askins, Environmentalist; Margarito Quintero Nuñez, UABC Engineering Institute; Miguel Shore, UABC Engineering Institute; Agustin Quintana, Centro de Refrigerants Recycling Center; Katherine Nickering, California Wilderness Coalition; Ma. Isabel Escobosa Garcia, UABC Agricultural Sciences Institute; Guadalupe Escobosa, Calexico City; Jesus Antonio Sanchez, Electricity Federal Commission, Geothermic Site, Cerro Prieto; Juan Pineda, California Association for Environmental Protection; Nayeli Treviño, Secretariat of Environmental Protection; Enriqueta Salazar, Technological Institute in Mexicali; César Corrales, Technological Institute in Mexicali; Abel Sanchez, Municipal Public Works; Miguel Angel Ramos, Municipal Public Works.

I. Welcome and Initial Comments

Efrain Nieblas welcomed everyone in attendance. He said to be very happy for having such a crowded session.

II. Revision of Minutes from Prior Meeting

Reyes Romero asked those who had had a chance to review the minutes, to mention any comments or suggestions for changes they might have on it. No one made any comments.

III. Presentations, Questions, and Answers

Update on Border Transportation Projects, Rosa Lopez

Ray Askins mentioned that to his understanding, the traffic study that is being done is not designed to handle peak traffic periods, and asked what is being done about that.

Rosa Lopez answered stating that IVAG and local governments, city of Calexico, and County of Imperial have seen that document. They have reviewed the draft, and have provided comments asking to include reports on those peak periods as well as on the effects the additional south bound checks on the Mexican side will have on the south bound traffic impact.

Reyes Romero asked if the meetings where they are discussing all these issues were public meetings. He also asked if copies of that report were going to be made available online.

Rosa Lopez said the discussions were held at public meetings. She also mentioned that those reports are made by the U.S. Department of General Services Administration, and she doesn't believe they are posted on the website.

Presentation on Refrigerants Recycling Centers, Agustin Quintana

Margarito Quintero asked about the procedure to follow in case a technician visits a home, and repairs an air conditioner to move the refrigerant gas to a recycling center.

Austin Quintana explained that the technician must have the necessary equipment to recuperate this gas, which is put into a cylinder to be able to take it to a recycling center. At the recycling center, an inspection process indicated by SEMARNAT and the U.N. through which it is determined if it should be destroyed is done.

Margarito Quintero asked if there was an economical benefit for the technician who recovers and takes this gas to the recycling center.

Agustin Quintana explained that technicians get a 50% saving on cost by recycling refrigerant gas, instead of buying virgin gas. He mentioned that the recycling centers are not currently buying refrigerant gas. However, he said that it is very possible for this to be done in the future.

Miguel Shore asked about the Technologies being used to destroy the refrigerants. If they do it through combustion, he asked how they prevent gases from disturbing the atmosphere causing global warming and harming human health.

Agustin Quintana explained that they are not currently destroying refrigerants at the Mexicali Recycling Center. These are sent to destruction Centers which have been approved by the Montreal Protocol, and at the same time, located in countries within the Vassel protocol. He said that at Mexicali, they are responsible of sending them to recycling centers which comply with this regulation.

Miguel Shore asked if there were destruction centers in Mexicali or in Mexico.

Agustín Quintana informed that there is only one destruction center currently operating through a private company in the city of Monterrey in Mexico.

Rodolfo Castro asked if there were any final disposal sites for equipment, tanks, and containers in Mexicali.

Agustín Quintana said that the recycling centers are currently offering this service. He explained that all the pollutants and not just the refrigerant gas are cleared from

disposable cylinders by a German procedure approved by the U.N. called inverse manufacturing.

Someone asked if anybody can buy the refrigerant gas.

Agustín Quintana answered saying that there is no current prohibition to buy the refrigerant gas. He also explained that SEMARNAT requires all people who commercialize this product, to issue a registration known as Pollutant Emissions and Transference Registration. In addition, he mentioned that when a refrigerant gas is confined with them, they make a manifest to inform about it, and when this gas is sent to a destruction center, a report informing where it has been transferred to is made. He informed that measurements and agreements that will be in effect next year, had been taken to retire refrigerant gases from the market.

Someone asked Agustín if the Agency which he represents was private or from the government.

Agustín Quintana answered that they work together with Environmental Agencies, but they are a private company just as the other 14 recycling centers which currently operate in Mexico.

He asked who they were receiving funding from.

Agustín Quintana answered that they operate through their own company's funding. He mentioned that at the beginning they received funds from the U.N. to obtain certain equipment for the recycling center, but that they are currently working with their own funds.

Update on Border 2012 Projects; Dave Fege, Efraín Nieblas, and Reyes Romero

Someone mentioned that he didn't agree on the burnings not affecting the city of Mexicali. He said that you only needed to hear the complaints to the authorities from the citizens in Mexicali to realize that they do affect the city. He mentioned that he was glad that a PM 10 was being done, and that a Project was being considered to avoid these emissions, but they had to be aware that a problem exists, and that these kinds of problems have to be minimized.

Reyes Romero stated that he had never said that a problem didn't exist. He explained that his Project was based on an emissions inventory, and that the total PM10 production due to burnings doesn't contribute to more than 5% of the total PM 10 emissions on the Imperial Valley inventory. Therefore, from a legal point of view, this is not a significant factor to the PM 10 problem. However this does not mean that they will not do something about it. He said that they were working with a committee to go over their rules, and check the Smog Management Plan along with the community to establish measures to reduce the impact on the community.

Ma. Isabel Escobosa mentioned that they should invite civilians from Mexicali to attend the Air Quality meetings so that they become aware of the kind of projects that are done here, and at the same time, promote their participation on them. She said that through the Agricultural Science Institute, a contribution is made to the task force by organizing congresses. At the end of the month of October, the Agricultural Science Congress participates on bringing down the use of machinery, and agricultural burnings, promotes the application of sun light to avoid the use of methyl bromine, bringing down the use of phosphate products to obtain better water quality.

Miguel Shore stated that the document that was handed out to them about desert dust storms should be based on a study about wind registrations on this border region. However, it is not based on anything like that.

Reyes Romero explained that what is required to them through the Cleaner Act is that each time that a PM 10 standard federal violation is registered, and that they can document that the violation was caused by a natural event, they should document it like that, and they should also make a study on the wind registrations on this region. To make this analysis they use the information from meteorological stations in the entire region, and said that they have all the detailed documents on their web page.

Miguel Shore explained that winds are not an isolated phenomenon, that it is linked to temperature, humidity, solar radiation, and precipitations. In other words, the wind is the air in movement, and it is produced by many factors that act in different ways, and this should be documented.

Reyes Romero said he totally agreed on the fact that the wind analysis should properly detailed. He said that with these analysis what should be determined is the dust origin which impacted the monitoring stations, and if it is a natural event.

Margarito Quintero mentioned that the document they had at hand was just a summary, and that it could not include all the information that the SIP includes.

Dave Fege said that first of all, he wanted to thank the woman from Mexicali for the comment. He said it had been a long time since he had been called a genius. He said he had a couple comments to make. First on Imperial County's PM 10 plan; although the board has approved the plan, ARB is still reviewing it, and EPA will review it after that so there is still a part of the process at a state, and federal level that it needs to be gone through. He also said he wanted to make a general comment, especially for people who don't participate in Air Quality every day; there are a lot of similarities between how two processes going on in the different sides of the border; there are three things that one basically needs: First, air quality monitoring which tells you what is the quality of the air you are breathing, and it would also give you an indication if the air quality is unhealthy; second, you do emissions inventory to find out where the pollution is coming from, and third, you develop organizations like SIP in the US, and Pro Aire in Mexico to take care of the problems.

IV. Updates

Dave Fege asked Reyes and Efrain if they were going to talk about the possibility of joining the advisory committee that they discussed in Monterrey.

Efrain Nieblas said that during the Air Policy Forum they talked to Ana Maria Contreras about the possibility of looking for a committee on air quality measures, but that nothing had been established. He mentioned he hoped to be able to retake this matter soon.

Reyes Romero stated that SEMARNAT in Mexico and EPA in the U.S. were interested in forming this group for Imperial Valley and Mexicali. He said they were going to continue talking about it on a meeting that will be held on October 26th and 27th in San Diego. He also said they would keep them posted on this at their next meeting.

Margarito Quintero mentioned that about 4 years ago, there was a genuine interest from Denise Duchene to establish this organization, and that because of this; she held a meeting to which people from the U.S. and Mexico attended. She accomplished to present an initiative to the California congress with this meeting, but it was not approved. Nothing was concluded in Mexico. He finished saying that this matter has precedents, and it would be nice to rescue it.

Dave Fege mentioned that in California the legislation was passed, but it was vetoed by the governor. He also said that the reason for him to bring this matter up was because on the Imperial's PM 10 plan, there are different perspectives, and feelings on both sides of the border, and a committee like the one we are discussing now would allow a more formal exchange of those types of comments, and it could also make recommendations to one side of the border, or the other.

Margarito Quintero mentioned that about approximately three years, Doctor Luisa Molina was in charge of a 10 million dollar Project funded by the U.S. government called Milagros, on which the pollution of the air in Mexico City was evaluated. He also mentioned that doctor Molina suggested to do something similar in the Mexican-American border. She has her Molina Center at California University in La Joya, and has been in contact with Efrain, and members of the academy, and is very interested on the participation of the UABC and Imperial Valley on this project, which would take place next year on the month of June. He explained that it would be a month and a half project of taking measurements at an earth, and atmosphere levels through the use of airplanes with especial equipment to do instant analyses, and a ship with the necessary equipment to take on evaluations in the harbor zone, particularly in San Diego, and Ensenada. He concluded informing that the doctor is planning on visiting Mexicali to have a meeting on which this project would be discussed more thoroughly. He also mentioned that in Monterrey, Nuevo León, The Third Workshop on Public Political Implications on New Scientific Discoveries about Atmospheric Pollution: Air Toxic Pollutants was recently held. He said that the Doctor mentioned that she would like Mexicali to be the host for 2011. Margarito proposed to be done through this organization.

Reyes Romero informed that he would circulate a copy of the presentation done by Doctor Molina in Monterrey for all the Committee members.

Dave Fege mentioned that the EPA has met with Luisa Molina, and that they are very supportive of the study, and expanding it into Baja because the way it was originally designed was to be done only in California. He explained that at not a great additional expense they can expand it into northern Baja and learn a lot about transport. He mentioned that they are trying to get some funding from the EPA to help Luisa Molina out.

Margarito Quintero asked if they already had the results on the projects funded by the 2012 program. He said he would like to know if there is a complete listing on the projects which were approved.

Dave Fege answered that the proposals for border environmental projects are still being reviewed, and that they were hopeful to be able to notify applicants that were successful by September 11th, but they are about two weeks behind and his guess is that by October 10th, they will be able to notify successful applicants.

Margarito Quintero asked about the AQS information because they need information on PM 2.5 and PM 10 from 2008, and the information is not updated.

Efrain Nieblas explained that they had been experiencing some problems with the transferring of data via internet to the air quality site due to the lack of software that was installed at the monitoring stations, which helped on the process. He mentioned that the software had been replaced, and that the information should updated soon.

V. Final Comments and date for the Next Meeting

Efrain Nieblas thanked everyone's participation, and invited them to continue participating on this task force. He said that the next meeting would be held in Imperial Valley in November. He said there were two possible dates for it: November 5th or November 12th, and that as soon as he had the exact date, everyone would be informed.

Meeting Adjourned.