

[Border 2012 Summary of Comments](#)

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

Ciudad Acuña, Coahuila

**November 5, 2002 • 5:00 pm**  
Summary of Public Comments and Questions

1. [unidentified speaker]: Why does it say in the document that we should contact SEMARNAT in Nuevo León or PROFEPA in Coahuila?

[Moderator]: That's a mistake.

Sergio Avilez: Any of us can respond to your concerns, whether at the state, municipal or local level.

2. Enrique [inaudible]: My concern is that on page two it says, "to protect the environment and public health," and I don't see any representatives of the Secretariat of Health of Mexico or of the United States.

[Moderator]: The program provides for coordination with various secretariats, especially public health in relation to public health problems caused by environmental problems.

Steve Niemeyer: On page 21 there is mention of a cross border work group on environmental health. They have participated in developing and drafting the plan and they will continue to be involved.

Margarita Palafox: Doctor [inaudible] from the Secretariat of Health is present.

Enrique [inaudible]: But I don't see any representation within your group, and I haven't seen any representatives at any of the meetings.

[Moderator]: That's a good point. I think the issue of public health is one that requires close coordination, and your comment is noted.

3. [unidentified speaker]: If we bring up an issue in this meeting, I would like to know how you, the authorities, channel those comments.

[unidentified panelist]: We have joint monthly meetings in every state in the country between the representatives of SEMARNAT, PROFEPA, CONAGUA to exchange information about what we are doing.

4. Conrado Piña, Coahuila Regional Cattle Ranchers Association Council: My question has to do with water and land contamination. For years cattle ranchers have been using various brands of insecticides for ticks and delousing agents on our cattle. I don't know if you are planning any kind of study to determine the effect of these substances on the water and the land in the border region. It would be a good idea to involve the companies that produce these chemicals to see if they do any monitoring of contamination.

[Moderator]: Yes, it is included on page 15. There is great concern about the use of insecticides and pesticides. One of the work groups will focus on reducing contamination.

5. Francisco Zambrano, journalist: My question has to do with the health impact of some of the factories and maquiladoras and the dump, which are releasing enormous amounts of contaminants. There are several people here tonight who live in an affected area. For example, trash is burned at the dump at night when we are all home. I can see that you all have great intentions, but I'm concerned about the number 2012. We're talking about ten more years. I brought my daughter for you to see for yourself. She has health problems caused by that environmental impact. Because they always do the burning at night. I have already reported to PROFEPA and SEMARNAT that the maquiladoras across the way do not have the necessary equipment to capture their environmental pollutants. And it's not just one family or one child, there are many affected families and many affected children. 2012 is ten years away, ten long years. Is it really going to take that long?

[Moderator]: I believe the authorities are concerned about that situation. The program covers a period of ten years in order to have achievable goals. I think there are situations, like this one, that must be resolved more quickly.

[unidentified panelist]: I would like to talk to you about this in greater detail after the meeting, and then pass along the information, study it, determine the correct channels and give it the attention required.

[break]

6. Dr. José Antonio Alvar Galván, Piedras Negras: It has been very interesting to us to see very active participation on the part of citizens and environmental groups over the many years this program has existed to improve environmental quality and public health. I am very pleased to see the Mexican government taking an interest in these problems, since many years ago it did not. There wasn't even a Department of the Environment and there was very little participation. In years past we have seen different events in the border region, as you will recall there were attempts to locate toxic waste dumps here in '90 and '91, and thanks to the active participation of the municipalities, we were able to prevent the

establishment of a toxic waste dump, because it was contrary to the La Paz agreement. That was a solid argument that was used and that was decisive in preventing the establishment of toxic waste dumps.

We have recently discovered that there is a plan to restart a project in the city of Piedras Negras that was rejected by decree during the Salinas administration, to establish a north strip mine. This project, planned by Minera Carbonífera Río Escondido mining company, would be located just one or two kilometers from the Rio Grande and would be practically inside part of the city of Piedras Negras. This would be very harmful for us. I would like this project to be noted. As far as we know, the company has been using legal arguments to have the Supreme Court reverse the decree so they can go in there. This is very worrisome to us and we want to know that you are aware of it and what your role would be in this case.

[Moderator]: I would like to make a comment regarding hazardous waste management. The Secretary [of SEMARNAT] has recognized that there is a demand for hazardous waste sites. There is technology available to recycle, deactivate and contain hazardous waste. There are very specific standards. I think it is important for us as citizens to recognize that it is better to know where this waste is and in what condition and be able to monitor hazardous waste rather than have a large unmet demand like we have now.

[unidentified panelist]: Regarding the Zacatosa strip mine, indeed there was a decree issued in eighty-eight to prevent the exploitation of that deposit. The argument the community used was that the use of explosives could damage nearby homes. And the new project specifies that no explosives will be used because the deposit is seven meters below the surface and the soil has a high clay content. In exchange for the environmental impact the company will have on the area, it is offering to restore the area within a maximum time frame of four years by building a tourism area that would include a lake. The project is being studied.

7. Ramiro Gomez Caldera, [inaudible] News Agency: As a citizen of Acuña, I am concerned about the contamination of the Las Vacas waterway, which then contaminates the Rio Grande. The problem is that the wastewater flows from the industrial area overwhelm the capacity of the collectors. Much of that water has come out near the Rio Grande. There have been reports of dead riparian fauna and contamination for human consumption. We get drinking water from there and they use it for drinking water downstream as well in Piedras Negras. This city is growing so fast that we need to plan for a larger capacity treatment plant.

Sergio Avilez: Specifically what I would like to see included in this document is the proposal we have been promoting for a long time, which is small treatment plants as close as possible to the sources of contamination.

Margarita Palafox: There is a work group between the six border states, SEMARNAT and its various subdivisions, including the National Water

Commission. We have established an advisory committee on the environment and natural resources. The proposal to establish treatment plants in the areas closest to the sources of contamination has been developed by the government of Coahuila and one of the commitments is to establish a comprehensive wastewater management program in the main tributaries where wastewater is being discharged. The National Water Commission is already working on funding for these plants.

8. [unidentified speaker]: My comment has to do with objectives and quantitative goals. You are planning environmental education programs targeted to preschool, primary and secondary school students as well as the community at large. Are the existing programs going to be strengthened or are you going to plan new strategies? Another question: is the area covered by your work 100 kilometers or is it going to be expanded to 300 as mentioned?

Margarita Palafox: With regard to environmental education, the existing programs will be strengthened. However, even though there is no formal group on environmental education, we are coordinating with the various environmental education departments of the state and federal governments in order to establish the appropriate binational programs in each regional group.

[Moderator]: For the purposes of this program, it's still one hundred kilometers on both sides of the border.

9. Roberto Canseco, Mexican Consul: I would like to say that because of our proximity to the border, the needs are often broader than the environmental aspect. This type of exercise often focuses on one type of symptom or one type of result. What is the possibility of including a more comprehensive approach? Especially on the Mexican side, so that, for example, in the case of municipal sewage treatment, we could think about housing and that housing could be a solution to the lack of sewer lines. All these municipal sewage treatment projects have to be paid for by the beneficiary, and we don't have that kind of payment practice in Mexico. If we could think in terms of a more integrated vision that would include housing as a package, that would be a solution that would get at the roots of the environmental problem. I hope these objectives can be expanded from exclusively environmental objectives to objectives like housing, for example.
10. Carlos Barrera, State Secretariat of Planning and Development: It is worrisome to us that the National Water Commission is not here. It was mentioned that the Commission is included in one of the committees, but I don't see any representation here. We have a concern about management of the ground water reserves that we have here on the border. We cannot think that the Rio Grande is always going to be our source of water supply. We have to start to regulate water controls. I don't know if among the proposals is the idea of rationing water appropriately so that we don't have the problem in the future of not having a

source of water and not being able to establish new companies in our region because we don't have any water reserves.

I'm from Piedras Negras. We have been in negotiations with the mining company regarding the damage that could be caused to the region. The state government hired a company to evaluate the possible damage the company's operations might cause. Currently, in order to start any kind of operation, the project has to go through several secretariats for authorization. If there is damage, we will try to establish that, not try to create a controversy that could affect sources of jobs in our region.

11. Frank Guevera, hazardous waste collection and transportation: I have been working in this area for nine years. Hazardous waste is strictly federal jurisdiction, the Secretariat of the Environment. We have a lot to learn about hazardous waste management. Many people don't know how to deal with it. My proposal is that both the state and the municipalities have to be involved in waste management; it should not be exclusively federal jurisdiction. Because the federal government does not have a big enough budget to oversee so many waste producers. Ultimately, we are all waste producers.
12. [unidentified speaker]: Point three talks about reducing land contamination in terms of the establishment of three large tire disposal sites. A few months ago the municipality of Piedras Negras attempted to do a survey to determine the number of tires in the two cities. Contamination caused by tires is a serious problem. Tires aren't used appropriately. It would be important to include this issue in your policies. We're talking about a tire shredding site to serve the municipalities of Allende, Piedras Negras, Jimenez, Acuña and the whole region.

Sergio Avilez: I would also like to talk not just about those three sites. I would like us to include the whole tire problem. As a state, we have suggested that by the year 2012 the states commit to properly storing or destroying 110% of the tires we produce. That is to take into account the fact that we have a back inventory that we have to start to dispose of as well. Whether by shredding or burying or whatever the solution may be.

Margarita Palafox: Tires are not within SEMARNAT's jurisdiction because they are solid waste, but we believe the tire situation is very serious and we need specific actions and coordination among the ten states to address it. The border governors made a joint declaration and the states are now operating with very concrete goals regarding tires.

13. Francisco Zambrano: I'm going to go back to the part about objectives. Number two, reduce air contamination. I repeat, the municipal dump is a problem that I don't want to be left in the air. If it could be included in this program that trash burning not be done at night, that is the first step. There are times when it seems

we will not see morning. It is a lot of smoke that is affecting the families of over eight neighborhoods.

Sergio Avilez: There is not going to be any more burning. There will be no more burning in a very short time when it is no longer a dump but a landfill. The burning has to stop. We have threatened heavy fines. But the last thing we want to do as the state government is enter into a conflict with a municipality that is willing to resolve the problem. One of the goals we want to see in the Border 2012 program is no more open-air trash burning anywhere in the state.

Francisco Zambrano: I know that is not true. Forgive me. This cannot be changed overnight. The best thing to do is to have a program. Do not burn trash at night. Burn it during the day.

Sergio Avilez: What we need to include in the Border 2012 program is no more trash burning at all.

14. Hector Moreno, Allende. There was a study three or four years ago that looked at establishing a regional landfill or a landfill at Cinco Manantiales. Studies have also been done in Acuña and Piedras Negras by private companies, which I think is the solution, but the municipalities do not have sufficient means. A lot of garbage is being produced very close by—in Allende, for example, there are houses next to the dump. The problem in Allende, aside from trash burning, is that there is no more room.

Sergio Avilez: One of the objectives of the program is to implement the studies that were done. One was done for Cinco Manantiales and another for the Carbonífera region. We have an agreement with the BECC to do so in the coming year. The solution is already halfway there. There are NADBANK funds for that. And we are close to achieving that. In the coming year we are going to implement that project.

15. [question off microphone]

Sergio Avilez: Yes, definitely, the use of ground water is included in the draft.

16. [unidentified speaker]: Two new proposals. One is that each maquiladora that generates waste have its own treatment plant for that waste. Second: it is very common on the border to see lots with hundreds and hundreds of old cars. They generate contamination from the paint, the breakdown of the batteries and other components, some regulation to prevent so much scrap on the border. Especially old cars.
17. Frank Guevara: Regarding tires, we have studied this issue from a business perspective. We know the machine costs \$150,000.00. We can shred an average of 100 tires per day. The cement plants are paying or could pay up to one peso per

kilo of shredded tires. We could load approximately 20 tons in a rail container. At that price we can't pay for the operation of the shredder. We will never start a tire operation unless the federal government comes up with the resources to shred the existing inventory of around 400,000 tires.

18. Roberto Canseco: I wonder if it would be possible for the document to provide for bilateral balance in the environmental contingency/emergency response groups. Because there is a tendency to carry out the exercises on the Mexican side and there should also be drills on the U.S. side.

Margarita Palafox: We have heard that comment before and actions are being taken in that regard.