JOINT COMMUNIQUÉ
U.S.-MEXICO BORDER ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM: BORDER 2020
THE 2015 NATIONAL COORDINATORS MEETING

We, the National Coordinators of the U.S.-Mexico Environmental Program: Border 2020 convened our first public meeting on September 21-23, 2015, in El Paso, Texas, to renew our bi-national partnership, celebrate our tangible successes, and identify key actions to achieving Border 2020 goals and objectives. We are delighted to continue to strengthen our partnership and collaboration with the ten Border States, 26 U.S. Border Tribes and Mexican Indigenous Communities, local governments, industry and the public.

We are finishing the third year under the Border 2020 Program and we are to redoubling our efforts to ensure that the Border 2020 goals are met in an efficient and effective way. In addition, we support the work and the recommendations of the Policy Fora and Regional Workgroups (and their respective Task Forces) included in their respective biennial Action Plans.

During our meeting, we discussed recommendations to improve the operation of the Program and received input from our partners and stakeholders on issues that need to be explored and considered. Border 2020 serves as a model of international cooperation and we are confident that with a renewed commitment, it will continue to be an example for other countries to observe and consider.

As in previous years, the Border 2020 program has made important advances in the conservation and sustainability of the U.S.-Mexico border region. To date, the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC) is managing thirty projects under the Border 2020 Program, sixteen of them in México and fourteen in the United States. Early this year we published a Highlights Report that displayed a few of these key projects.

Reducing Air Pollution

We continue to work together to reduce pollutant emissions, improve access to air quality information, and bring cleaner, healthier air to the border region. Through the Regional Workgroups, Task Forces, and the Air Policy Forum, we are working to decrease air pollution associated with idling trucks, busses, and cars at border crossings; unpaved roads; and agricultural practices. We have implemented projects such as emissions inventories, air quality monitoring, and State Implementation Plans and PROAIRES. We have also initiated projects to increase public awareness of air quality in the region, including the AIRNOW website and targeted public information campaigns.

We recognize the interest of both countries in addressing climate change and appreciate the work of the States and communities in the border region to improve energy efficiency, increase energy generation from renewable sources, and reduce greenhouse gases and other air emissions generated by fossil fuels. Recently, the USEPA has adopted the Clean Power Plan that will reduce Carbon Dioxide from existing and new fossil fuel power plants. In addition, we thank the Border Environment Cooperation Commission (BECC), the North American Development Bank, and the National Institute of Ecology and Climate Change (INECC) for their support and expertise in these issues.

Reducing Water Contamination

We continue working to improve water quality in the border region. These improvements are a result of projects and activities implemented to target the elimination of raw sewage discharges into water bodies shared by U.S. and Mexico, the cleanup of several binational watersheds, and the construction and modernization of wastewater treatment plants and drinking water systems in the border communities.

One of the most important achievements was the construction and inauguration of the first renewable energy-powered wastewater treatment plant in the border region. The "Los Alisos" Wastewater Treatment and Conveyance Plant, located in Nogales, Sonora, has the capacity to treat 220 liters per second of raw sewage and to receive wastewater flows from approximately 20,300 existing residences. The Plant includes a $4.5 million on-site solar energy plant, the first of its kind in Latin America, with an installed capacity of nearly one Megawatt that will supply the electricity needs of the Plant.

Reducing Land Contamination

We acknowledge the ongoing challenges to both, reduce waste and divert recyclable materials from landfills, while also continuing to keep pace with needed capacity to manage solid, hazardous, and special waste streams and cleanup former solid waste dump sites and contaminated hazardous waste sites.

The cleanup of trash and tire piles and collection of electronic waste, especially discontinued televisions due to the switch from analog to digital in Mexico, are among the most visible border wastes that have garnered the most attention and resources. Trash and scrap tires in particular, pose public health and environmental concerns because of the disease vectors, air quality impacts, as well as, urban blight. Newer initiatives are increasing the community's awareness about the global public health and environmental threats posed by plastics in our watersheds and oceans, and the role consumer choices, as well as, public policies have in reversing these threats.

We also keep promoting efforts to improve and prevent public health and environmental impacts in the homes by implementing several workshops and training sessions to increase the community's awareness on the use of alternative, safer household products and to safely manage and dispose of any household hazardous waste.

We will continue to promote transparency in the sharing of information on border hazardous waste treatment, storage, and disposal facility locations through the Consultative Mechanisms and consider new information sharing opportunities, such as, promoting awareness of R2 and e-Stewards certified electronic recyclers, offering a safe and efficient alternative to landfilling.

Enhancing Joint Readiness for Environmental Response

We continue to evaluate, update and implement the emergency notification system for the U.S. and Mexico, in collaboration with the U.S. National Response Center (NRC), Mexico's Federal Attorney General for Environmental Protection (PROFEPA), in partnership with Mexico's National Coordination of Civil Protection (CNPC).

We coordinated and promoted several capacity building events, providing emergency response equipment to Mexican responders and related training, planning of exercises, seminars, and in the participation of various border meetings. We are also working to expand preparedness efforts relating to the development of training mechanisms for hazardous materials response, incident command system and exercise design. As we increased coordination with states, local and federal partners, we enhanced response readiness, cross border collaboration and training continuance for responders and counterparts by developing outreach materials. In addition, we are analyzing emergency certification mechanisms to enhance hazardous materials response capabilities to protect public health and the environment.

Commitment to Improving Environmental Performance

We continue to promote programs of voluntary audits in Mexico. We promote the adoption of voluntary programs by simplifying the registration process for the industries who want to participate in the efforts to reduce their environmental impacts.

We continue our efforts to enforce environmental law in the border region, prioritizing those efforts focused on diminishing impacts to human health and the environment, and by following up on previously audited industries by applying appropriate laws and regulations.

Collaboration with the Border Health Commission (BHC)

We have been working with the BHC for the past two years on important issues to improve the environment and public health along the U.S.-Mexico border region under the terms of the 2013-2014 collaborative agreement. Under that agreement, we launched Healthy Border 2020, established Pediatric Environmental Health Specialty Units (PEHSU) along the border, increased environmental health capacity, and built leadership. We are currently working together to form a new collaborative agreement to advance efforts and outline priority areas that focus on environmental and public health challenges along the border region. The priority areas identified in the new agreement include public health and environmental leadership, building environmental health capacity, and strengthening institutional resiliency and accountability. Under the new agreement we will be focusing on the implementation of new and already identified projects.

We congratulate our partners, stakeholders, and participants who have contributed to the Border 2020 Program's success and accomplishments during these past three years of work, and challenge ourselves to increase our efforts as we begin implementation of the Action Plans for the 2015-2016 period.

Finally, we invite you to join us in renewing our dedication and commitment to developing comprehensive binational solutions to the environmental challenges that persist in the border region. Next year is an important one for the Border 2020 Program because we will start the mid-term evaluation of the Program and will be publishing the 2016 Border Indicators Report to help ensure that our border collaboration translates into tangible environmental benefits for communities along the U.S.-México border region.

Jane Nishida
National Coordinator, United Sates

Enrique Lendo
National Coordinator, México

September, 2015