

The U.S.-Mexico Border Program (Border 2012) Celebrates Progress and Looks Towards Future

National Coordinators Meeting: May 22, -24, 2007

On May 22- 24, 2007, the fourth annual National Coordinators Meeting (NCM) was hosted in San Antonio, Texas. The NCM focused on Border 2012's accomplishments to date; the launching of the Border 2012 mid-term and implementation report; and discussion on mid-course refinements needed to enhance the Border 2012 program. A few examples of environmental progress made thus far, included:

- The cleanup and removal of over 3 million tires that posed public health risk (tires were used as fuel or in highway paving projects).
- Between 2003 and 2005, EPA's Border Environment Infrastructure Fund (BEIF) funded projects for creating and improving drinking water and wastewater infrastructure that serves over 1.5 million people.
- More than 2000 tons of hazardous waste was cleaned up from the abandoned "Metales and Derivados" lead recovery facility in Tijuana, Baja California. Site clean-up removed the risk of lead contamination from a border community of more than 10,000 people.

Finally, participants made key recommendations on refining the Border 2012 program, including redefining objectives, re-establishing bridges in communication, and new approaches. Both countries signed a Joint Communiqué re-affirming their commitment and collaboration towards protecting the environment and human health along the U.S.-Mexico Border. The communiqué also acknowledged the participation and contribution from tribal & indigenous communities along both sides of the border.

EPA Administrator Johnson visit to U.S.-Mexico Border

On June 25-29, Administrator Johnson traveled to the U.S.- Mexico Border on his way to and from Morelia, Michoacán while attending the annual meeting of the North American Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC).

On Monday, June 25, 2007, the last of the 14 major sister city agreements was signed between the communities of El Paso, Texas – Municipality of Juarez, Chihuahua -Sunland Park, New Mexico. EPA Administrator Stephen L. Johnson and Region 6 Administrator Richard E. Greene were on hand to witness the signing of this event. "It's really important for us to take stock of the fact that from California all the way to Texas, we've established these sister city agreements. I was thinking about it today, about the importance of signing this agreement and the work that's been done over this past decade," Johnson said. "Yes, it is for handling emergencies. But, what it's really for is to help the people of our nation, not only those of us that are aging ...but it is protecting our nation's most vulnerable populations: our children and grandchildren and future generations." Johnson said (*El Paso Times*, June 26, 2007).

A critical element of Goal #5 the U.S.-Mexico Environmental Program Border 2012 is the development of 14 major sister city partnerships between municipalities in the United States and

Mexico. Sister cities build confidence along the US. – Mexico border by having communities jointly work and plan in the event an environmental emergency should impact either side of the border. Plans call for police, fire, paramedics, and other emergency response personnel from both sides of the border to respond quickly to large fires, dangerous chemical spills, or other emergencies. The plans also address preparedness issues including: hazard identification; pollution prevention; risk reduction; training; exercises; and equipment. The first sister city emergency plan was signed in 1997 between Brownsville, Texas - Matamoros, Tamaulipas, Mexico. Administrator Jonson also met with Tribal leaders from the Ysleta del Sur Pueblo of Texas and participated on a walking tour of their bio diesel facility.

On his way back from Morelia, Administrator Johnson traveled to Mexicali, Baja California to personally observe measurable results and progress being made on-the-ground. Administrator Johnson first met with key Baja California representatives and presented Baja California Governor Elorduy with a commemorative plaque to acknowledge his leadership and support of the Border 2012 Program. Administrator Johnson then visited the newly constructed wastewater treatment plant in Mexicali (partially funded by EPA's Water Border Infrastructure Program). This new plant will remove the 14 mgd of raw sewage entering the New River (which originates in Mexico and enters the U.S. in Calexico, California). Administrator Johnson concluded his visit by touring the New River and a brief visit with California representatives.

The U.S. - Mexico Border 2012 Program is a 10-year, binational program focused on making measurable improvements in environmental quality and health along the U.S.-Mexico border. It represents a partnership of cooperation among the federal governments of Mexico and the U.S., the ten border-states, the 26 U.S. border tribes, local authorities, academia and the public and private sectors.