

BORDER 2012: U.S. - MEXICO ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM

“To protect public health and the environment in the U.S.-Mexico border region, consistent with the principles of sustainable development”

Border 2012 is a 10-year, binational, results-oriented environmental program for the U.S.-Mexico border region, which has been developed by the EPA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Secretaría de Medio Ambiente y Recursos Naturales (Mexico’s Secretariat of Environment and Natural Resources), Secretaría de Salud (Mexico’s Secretariat of Health), the U.S. border Tribes, and the environmental agencies from each of the ten border states. The proposed Border 2012 Program is the latest multi-year, binational planning effort to be implemented under the La Paz Agreement and succeeds Border XXI, a five-year program that ended in 2000.

Background

For decades, the U.S. and Mexico have collaborated on efforts to protect the environment and health of border communities. The formal foundation for these binational efforts is the La Paz Agreement signed by Presidents De la Madrid and Reagan in 1983. The agreement is implemented through multi-year binational programs such as Border XXI, which was initiated in 1996 with a five-year plan for addressing the most challenging environmental and environmentally-related health problems in the region.

Although most of the Border XXI projects were implemented at the local level, its organizational structure emphasized border-wide coordination and planning. Nine border-wide workgroups -- each focused on a particular environmental program, such as air quality or hazardous waste management -- coordinated the efforts of various federal, state, tribal and local governmental activities in the border area. The new Border 2012 Program builds upon the successes achieved under Border XXI while also establishing a regionally-focused border plan to facilitate environmental priority setting and planning at the regional and local levels.

A New Approach

The proposed Border 2012 emphasizes a bottom-up approach, anticipating that local decision making, priority setting and project implementation will best address environmental issues in the border region. Border 2012 will emphasize concrete measurable results, public participation, transparency, and timely access to environmental information.

The Border 2012 Program proposes some key changes from Border XXI including:

- 1) new mission statement
- 2) ten year planning period
- 3) integration of natural resource issues, pollution prevention and environmental information into the activities of all coordinating bodies
- 4) new organizational structure that focuses on regional workgroups to facilitate regional- and local-level planning and priority setting.

We invite public comments related to all aspects of the propose Border 2012 plan. Individuals can submit comments directly by filling out the public comment form at: <http://www.epa.gov/usmexicoborder>

Interested parties can also mail or fax comments to the EPA Border Offices at the addresses and fax numbers listed below:

EPA El Paso Border Office
4050 Rio Bravo, Suite 100
El Paso, TX 79902
[T] 915-533-7273 [F] 915-533-2327

EPA San Diego Border Office
610 West Ash St., Suite 905
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[T] 619-235-4765 [F] 619-235-4771

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The major features of the Border 2012 program are the coordinating bodies, goals and measurable objectives, and reporting results to the public.

Coordinating Bodies

Border 2012 is organized around coordinating bodies. These coordinating bodies include the following: the National Coordinators, four regional (geographically-focused) workgroups, three border-wide workgroups, and three policy forums.

A) National Coordinators. Consistent with the requirements of the La Paz Agreement, the National Coordinators will monitor and manage implementation of the Border 2012 Program and ensure cooperation and communication among all coordinating bodies.

B) Regional Workgroups. Providing the foundation of the Border 2012 Program, four multi-media, regionally-focused workgroups will support the efforts of local task forces and coordinate activities at the regional and local level. The proposed regional workgroups are the following:

- California-Baja California
- Arizona-Sonora
- New Mexico-Texas-Chihuahua
- Texas-Coahuila-Nuevo León-Tamaulipas

Each regional workgroup will be co-chaired by one state and one federal representative from each country.

C) Border-wide Workgroups. Border-wide workgroups will concentrate on issues that are multi-regional (identified as a priority by two or more regional workgroups) and primarily federal in nature (requiring direct, high-level, and sustained leadership by federal program partners in the United States and Mexico). Three border-wide workgroups will have federal U.S. and Mexican co-chairs for the following issues: environmental health, emergency preparedness and response, and cooperative enforcement and compliance.

D) Policy Forums. Policy Forums will have a media-specific focus and will concentrate on broad policy issues that require an on-going dialogue between the two countries. Three policy forums will be established to address policy issues and provide technical assistance to the regional and border-wide workgroups in the following areas: air; water; and hazardous waste, solid waste, and toxic substances.

Goals and Objectives

Border 2012 establishes the following five border-wide environmental goals for the U.S.-Mexico border region:

1. Reduce water contamination
2. Reduce air pollution
3. Reduce land pollution
4. Reduce exposure to pesticides, particularly children's exposure
5. Reduce exposure to chemicals as a result of accidental chemical releases and/or deliberate acts of terrorism.

For each of the above goals, measurable objectives have been proposed. In all, there are twenty-two measurable objectives in the areas of: homes connected to potable water, wastewater collection and treatment systems; surface and groundwater water quality; ambient air quality standards; human risk from air toxics; voluntary compliance in maquiladoras; hazardous and solid waste capacity in the border region; hazardous waste violations at ports of entry; tire piles; brownfields; pesticide exposure; contingency planning; and binational emergency planning.

Reporting Results

Every two years the coordinating bodies will publish an implementation report that describes the status of current and proposed activities under the Border 2012 program. In addition, comprehensive mid-term and final progress reports that describe progress on meeting the goals and objectives of the program, including environmental indicators, will be published in 2006 and 2012 respectively.