

CENTRAL TEXAS ENVIRONMENTAL SUMMIT ENCOURAGES PARTNERSHIPS

Attendees Learn How They Play a Part in State's Environmental Successes



TCEQ photos



The third Central Texas Environmental Summit, held Dec. 8 in Bastrop, brought together members of the public and state officials to discuss the environmental challenges unique to this ever-growing area of the state, and the opportunities for long-term solutions.

The event, hosted by the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality and District 14 State Senator Kirk Watson, was entitled Collaboration Along the Corridor.

“We’re here not to tell what we are doing, we are here to engage you—and we want to make sure that you know that we are a partner; in fact we have over 2,000 employees that are stakeholders in this process, as well,” said TCEQ Chairman Bryan W. Shaw, Ph.D., P.E. “I’m very proud of what we have achieved in Texas.”

A Concerted Effort

Public involvement was the center point of the event as speakers emphasized how individuals, neighborhood groups, and municipalities have been an integral part of the state’s economic and environmental successes.

Pictured left: Attendees visit the information booths at the Central Texas Environmental Summit.



(From left) TCEQ Commissioners Toby Baker and Bryan W. Shaw, Ph.D., P.E.; Rep. Jason Isaac; Sen. Kirk Watson; and TCEQ Commissioner Zak Covar.

“We don’t have to make a choice between good environment and a strong economy—in fact we have to choose to protect both, or we will have neither,” said Chairman Shaw. “If we fail to have a strong environment, we are going to have a hard time attracting people who will come here to live and work and raise a family.”

The summit offered the public an opportunity to meet with TCEQ staff and see exhibits highlighting agency programs, as well as displays from other state and local agencies in attendance. The TCEQ’s Emergency Response Mobile Command Post and a continuous air-monitoring station were set up outside for tours.

Overcoming Obstacles

“Over 90 percent of the 34 active benzene monitors in the state showed a decrease in their annual average concentration, in spite of all of the economic growth,” said Chairman Shaw. “In 2013, all are below the state safe level. Between 2000 and 2013, ozone levels in Texas have dropped by 24 percent. The bottom line is that Texas air is safe to breathe.”

“The fact is, most of the ozone issues in our state can be attributed to increased automobile traffic, something our agency doesn’t regulate,” Commissioner Baker told the audience. “For instance, the average miles traveled in Austin have increased from 35 million miles in 2000 to 51 million now. And it’s expected to jump to 70 million.

“We are extremely constrained in Austin with what we can actually do to lower ozone further, because we can’t go in and put changes in place that have to do with vehicles. And what does that mean if we fall into EPA nonattainment [for ozone]? It’s tougher on the economy, because they’re going to think twice about coming to build.”

“It was good, useful information,” said Gonzales resident Gary Brecosky. “I learned about the cars being the biggest problem with the ozone problems, which I wasn’t aware of. I work as an environmental health and safety manager for a business in Gonzales, and I always think about it being more industrial, and it was interesting to see it was traffic.”

Spreading the Word

Those in attendance learned how they can do their part to improve not only the environment in their homes and workplaces, but also their outside surroundings. Commissioner



TCEQ Emergency Response Mobile Command Post tours were offered to attendees.

Zak Covar highlighted the agency’s Take Care of Texas program, which encourages personal responsibility to meet these goals.

“Anything you do at home, and collectively, has as much of an impact as any permit that we authorize or any enforcement action we take,” he said. “So collectively we have an opportunity for all of us to take care of Texas.”

“It was very good information,” said Gonzales resident Rhonda Miller. “You start with the kids, teaching these things... to prepare them for the future.”

“It was a good event and really good information,” said Bastrop resident Patrick Clark. “I turn the water off because sometimes you can be there for a few minutes. You turn the water off, and you try to conserve, you try not to waste water, you try not to waste energy—in part because you have to pay for it, but mainly it’s to conserve what we have.” 🇺🇸



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