



**Border 2012 Four-State Regional Workgroup
Texas-Tamaulipas-Nuevo León–Coahuila**

Amistad Task Force

WORKPLAN AND PROGRESS REPORT

Priorities and Projects (2006-2011)

Updated in January 2011

Background

The **Amistad Task Force** is one of three Task Forces that together comprise the **Four-State Regional Workgroup** under Border 2012. This Regional Workgroup includes the border regions of three Mexican states (Coahuila, Nuevo León, and Tamaulipas) and the adjoining border region of Texas.

The three Task Forces in the Workgroup are geographically defined; this arrangement was established at the beginning of 2006. The **Amistad Task Force** covers a geographical area that includes the following adjacent areas of Texas and Coahuila: the Counties of Maverick, Kinney, Val Verde, and Terrell in Texas, and the Municipios of Piedras Negras and Acuña in Coahuila.

This Workplan and Progress Report lists the priority challenges that have been identified by the Task Force since 2006, and the projects and programs that have been proposed to address those priorities. In the Amistad Task Force area, the relatively small population has resulted in a group of interested persons who meet together to discuss all the issues, rather than dividing into committees that meet separately (as the Falcon and Gulf Task Forces do). The only exception to this is the officials in the agencies responsible for emergency preparedness, who meet as a smaller group to negotiate the details of collaboration and oversee training courses.

Contents

Issue related to Water	2
Issues related to Waste	3
Issues related to Emergency Preparedness	6
Using Environmental Education as a Tool.....	8

Issue related to Water

Border 2012 Goal: Reduce Water Contamination

Priority: Remediation of old oxidation lagoons in Piedras Negras

Border 2012 Objective Being Addressed: Objective 2 is to "...improve water quality in transboundary waters."

Project/Program:

***Title:* "Remediation of old oxidation lagoons in Piedras Negras, Coahuila"**

Funding Source: Secretariat of the Environmental for the State of Coahuila

Lead Implementing Agencies: Municipio of Piedras Negras

Other Partner(s): State of Coahuila, University of Coahuila

Explanation and Status: Piedras Negras constructed an oxidation lagoon system in the 1960s to dispose of wastewater effluent, prior to the development of a wastewater treatment plant that now treats 8.2 MGD. Over time, the lagoon system presented environmental health challenges for nearby residents because of exposure to harmful odors.

In 2008 Piedras Negras signed an agreement with the State of Coahuila that gave the city access to necessary equipment to dredge soil from the lagoons and send it to a landfill for final disposal. As of July 2009, ten acres of the 30-acre site had been remediated at a cost of \$300,000. The agreement ended in late 2009, but with funds now available to complete the project, Piedras Negras is seeking to renew its agreement with the state regarding the equipment.

At an Amistad Task Force meeting in November 2010, PROFEPA officials mentioned the need to conduct soil samples for the presence of heavy metals at the site and expressed interest in assisting Piedras Negras with this task.

Result/Product: The project will remediate a contaminated site and eliminate the exposure of neighbors to harmful odors.

Issues related to Waste

Border 2012 Goal: Reduce Land Contamination

Priority #1: Eliminate scrap tires that accumulate in piles and abandoned tires in arroyos and vacant lots.

Border 2012 Objective Being Addressed: Objective 1 asks stakeholders to "identify needs and develop an action plan to improve institutional and infrastructure capacity for waste management and pollution prevention as they pertain to hazardous and solid waste and toxic substances along the U.S.-Mexico border."

Projects/Programs:

A. **Title: "Clean-up of scrap tire piles in Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass and development of sustainable programs"**

Funding Source(s): EPA

Lead Implementing Agencies: City of Eagle Pass and Municipio of Piedras Negras

Other Partner(s): U.S. EPA, CEMEX, Servicios Ambientales de Coahuila, Middle Rio Grande Development Council

Explanation and Status: By the middle of the past decade, Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass had accumulated scrap tire piles that posed potential public health problems. Such piles provide breeding grounds for mosquitoes and can also create acute air quality episodes when spontaneous fires occur.

In 2006 Eagle Pass and Piedras Negras received a jointly awarded grant for \$80,000 from EPA's Border 2012 program to dispose of accumulated scrap tires. Approximately 210,000 scrap tires were sent by rail from Piedras to a CEMEX plant in Torreón, Coahuila to be used as tire-derived fuel. The original plan was for Eagle Pass to send scrap tires to the same destination, using the same rail line (which crosses the border near the tire collection site). But Mexican customs officials denied a permit request. As an alternative, Eagle Pass sent its inventory at the time (29,000 scrap tires) to the San Antonio landfill for disposal.

Since 2006, each city has been exploring options for long-term management of scrap tires that would be economic without grant assistance. In 2008 Eagle Pass implemented a pilot project in partnership with a Colorado company to construct development of sidewalks made with a mix of crumb rubber (from tires) and concrete. Approximately 300 linear feet of sidewalks were installed. But at the conclusion of the pilot project, the City determined that the program did not merit continuation.

Meanwhile, Eagle Pass has been using its recycling drop-off center to collect scrap tires from residents and continues to ship them to the San Antonio landfill for final disposal (5,200 tires in 2010, down from 12,000 in 2008). Piedras Negras sends scrap tires to its municipal landfill.

At a meeting of the Amistad Task Force in November 2010, Materiales Industrializados S.A. de C.V. (a Mexican engineering company) expressed interest in developing a scrap tire recycling facility in Maverick County that could receive tires from both Eagle Pass and

Piedras Negras. The plant would process scrap tires for to produce rubberized asphalt and playground material. Preliminary design studies for the facility have been completed. Materiales Industrializados is in the process of identifying a site and obtaining permits, and intends to meet with Mexican and U.S. customs officials to make appropriate arrangements for shipping scrap tires from Piedras to the plant site for the purpose of recycling.

Result/Product: Existing scrap tire piles were eliminated in 2007. Identification and development of markets that are economic for each of the two cities will assure sustainable management of the ongoing generation of scrap tires and significantly reduce the public health risks associated with scrap tire piles.

B. Title: “Clean-up and elimination of scrap tire piles in Ciudad Acuña”

Funding Sources: Cd. Acuña, SEMARMAT, and the Secretariat for the Environment of the State of Coahuila

Lead Implementing Agencies: Municipio of Ciudad Acuña

Other Partner(s): SEMARNAT, Coahuila’s Secretariat for the Environment

Explanation and Status: In 2008, Ciudad Acuña received commitments of funding from SEMARNAT and Coahuila’s Secretariat for the Environment to implement a scrap tire clean-up and disposal project. Acuña subsequently paid for the transport of scrap tires to Piedras Negras, at which point the State of Coahuila paid the unloading costs, and then SEMARNAT paid to ship the tires by railroad to a CEMEX plant in Monterrey. The project ended in November 2009 after processing more than 60,000 scrap tires.

In an effort to manage the continuing generation of scrap tires, Ciudad Acuña has established three tire collection stations. The collected tires are then shipped to a lot located next to the landfill for storage. As of mid-2010, the latter site had accumulated more than 10,000 scrap tires. Ciudad Acuña is seeking to develop an agreement with PASA (a solid waste services provider) to rent the company’s equipment and process scrap tires at the site. As a second step, Acuña has also made a request to SEMARNAT for funding to ship the shredded material to the CEMEX plant in Monterrey.

Result/Product: Better scrap tire management, reducing the negative public health consequences of scrap tire piles.

Priority #2: Remediation and clean-up of the old Eagle Pass landfill

Border 2012 Objective Being Addressed: Sub-Objective 4A includes the language “...develop a binational policy of clean-up and restoration resulting in the productive use of abandoned sites contaminated with hazardous waste or materials...”

Project:

Title: “Clean-up of the old Eagle Pass landfill”

Funding Sources: City of Eagle Pass, plus additional source to be determined

Proposed Implementing Agency: City of Eagle Pass

Explanation and Status: A 25-acre landfill near the riverbank of the Rio Grande was operated by Eagle Pass from 1958 to 1979. The State of Texas later established MSW regulations that made remediation necessary. As of July 2009, five acres and 25,000 cubic yards had been cleaned up and a protective cap was added to the site. Eagle Pass plans to develop a green area and restore the site. The cost to remediate the remaining 20 acres is approximately \$3.5 million, and Eagle Pass has not yet identified a source for that funding. The city is considering testing the soil for toxics and filing an application for brownfield site designation, which would qualify it for technical assistance and funding from the EPA for assessment and clean-up.

Result/Product: Eagle Pass would transform a contaminated site near the Rio Grande into a green space for recreational use.

Priority #3: Eliminate electronic waste that accumulates in lots and creek areas.

Border 2012 Objective Being Addressed: Objective 1 asks stakeholders to "identify needs and develop an action plan to improve institutional and infrastructure capacity for waste management and pollution prevention as they pertain to hazardous and solid waste and toxic substances along the U.S.-Mexico border."

Project:

Title: **Used Electronics Project in Eagle Pass-Piedras Negras**

Funding Source: Border 2012

Lead Implementing Agencies: City of Eagle Pass and Municipio of Piedras Negras

Other Partner(s): Instituto Tecnológico de Piedras Negras

Explanation and Status: Rapid technological advances have led to a relatively high turnover in the stock of computers, cell phones, and other electronic devices in use. These technologies contain toxic materials. Programs to manage appropriate disassembly, recycling, and disposal have not kept up with the turnover, resulting in serious health and environmental risks related to accumulating discarded equipment.

In January 2010 Eagle Pass received a \$30,000 Border 2012 grant from EPA to initiate a binational program for processing used electronics in collaboration with Piedras Negras. Eagle Pass worked with a local recycler to place containers for used electronic products at the city's recycling center, and Piedras Negras established its own collection centers. Collected materials are shipped from these centers to the recycler's facility to be disassembled. The facility then sends the resulting discrete categories of dissembled materials to a variety of higher-level recycling companies that have contracts to provide manufacturers with recovered materials as input for producing new products.

The grant also included an environmental education component to foster awareness on the hazards of used electronic products and on disposal options, and to encourage residents to recycle. Eagle Pass used this funding to contract with Green-Tec Osos, an environmental group in Piedras Negras, to provide training on used electronic disposal options and their health risks. In the first phase, Green-Tec Osos worked with 40 elementary schools in Piedras Negras and educated 11,000 students through brochures and videos. The second phase of the program began in October 2010 and consists of working with elementary schools in Eagle Pass and middle and high schools in Piedras Negras.

Result/Product: The program promotes public awareness of the health risks posed by used electronic products and increase proper disposal, including recycling, in both cities.

Issues related to Emergency Preparedness

Border 2012 Goal: Enhance Joint Readiness for Environmental Response

Priority #1: Continue developing binational coordination for emergency response activities.

Border 2012 Objective Being Addressed: Objective 3A includes language about “preparedness and prevention related efforts, such as...certified training...and capacity building.”

Projects/Programs:

A. ***Title: “On-going enhancement of joint capabilities for cooperation between Piedras Negras and Eagle Pass on emergency preparedness”***

Funding Sources: EPA and the Northern Command Unit of the U.S. Department of Defense

Lead Implementing Agencies: Eagle Pass Fire Department and Protección Civil in Piedras Negras

Other Partner(s): State of Coahuila Protección Civil and the Kickapoo Traditional Tribe of Texas

Explanation and Status: Emergency response officials in Eagle Pass and Piedras Negras, along with Kickapoo Tribe first responders, have collaborated in joint emergency response exercises with EPA and TCEQ assistance. In November 2008 a Tri-National Emergency Response exercise took place in Piedras Negras focusing on response time and evacuation methods and simulating a chemical spill near railroad tracks. Response teams were designated, and hospitals participated in the exercise as well. The exercise was technically successful, but participants conclude they would like to develop a faster response time.

As part of a collaboration between EPA and the Department of Defense Northern Command Unit (NorthCom) focused on Mexican border cities, NorthCom donated hazmat suits and other equipment to Piedras Negras in the last half of 2010, and EPA provided training (through a contracted company) on the equipment..

In November 2010 EPA announced a \$130,000 grant (awarded to the BECC for overall management) to update the joint emergency preparedness and response plan for Eagle Pass and Piedras Negras, as well as the joint plan for Del Rio and Acuña. Working with the BECC, EPA officials will conduct workshops in the spring of 2011 with authorities from different levels of government in each area to help guide the process. The local officials will develop revision strategies and timelines aimed at preparing new plans for approval by the respective cities. As part of the plans, they will conduct hazard analyses and risk maps that identify potential environmental risks associated with industrial facilities; develop an electronic directory of response personnel, organizations, capabilities, and resources;

develop decision-support tools for evacuation and decision-making; and agree on a proposed joint/unified command structure for different response scenarios.

Result/Product: Continuing efforts will establish a high level of coordination between first responders across international borders and decrease the response times.

B. Title: “On-going enhancement of joint capabilities for cooperation between Ciudad Acuña and Del Rio on emergency preparedness”

Funding Source: EPA and the Northern Command Unit of the U.S. Department of Defense

Lead Implementing Agencies: Del Rio Fire Department and Protección Civil in Acuña

Other Partner(s): Protección Civil of the State of Coahuila

Explanation and Status: Del Rio and Acuña emergency response officials have collaborated in joint emergency response exercises, with EPA and TCEQ assistance.

Following through on an earlier commitment that had been communicated through EPA, in June 2009 the Northern Command Unit (NORTHCOM) of the Department of Defense provided equipment such as hazmat suits and also training to Acuña responders.

Del Rio has developed a Hazard Mitigation Plan that establishes procedures to reduce and eliminate long-term risks caused by natural hazards. Acuña is in the process of developing a high-flood risk map to identify vulnerable areas that are susceptible to flooding, as well as establish evacuation and response procedures in case of natural disasters.

In November 2010 EPA announced a \$130,000 grant (awarded to the BECC for overall management) to update the joint emergency preparedness and response plan for Eagle Pass and Piedras Negras, as well as the joint plan for Del Rio and Acuña. [Additional information on the implementation of this grant is provided in the discussion of the Eagle Pass-Piedras Negras project immediately preceding in this report.]

Result/Product: High level of coordination between first responders across international borders.

Using Environmental Education as a Tool

Environmental education does not have its own “goal” in Border 2012. It is considered a tool for assisting in the accomplishment of the goals related to water, air, land contamination/waste, waste, environmental stewardship, emergency response, and environmental health.

Border 2012 Goal: Reduce Land Contamination

Priority #1: Develop public education programs to address recycling, energy efficiency and water conservation issues.

Border 2012 Objective related to “Land Contamination” Being Addressed through Environmental Education: Objective 1 under the “Land Contamination” goal asks stakeholders to "identify needs and develop an action plan to improve institutional and infrastructure capacity for waste management and pollution prevention as they pertain to hazardous and solid waste and toxic substances along the U.S.-Mexico border."

Project:

Title: “Early Childhood Environmental Education Program in Del Rio”

Funding Source: Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program

Lead Implementing Agencies: City of Del Rio

Other Partner(s): San Felipe-Del Rio Consolidated Independent School District

Explanation and Status: As part of the U.S. federal Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant Program, Del Rio received funding to invest in renewable energy efficiency programs in schools. A portion of the grant was used to develop an environmental education program to bring awareness of recycling, energy efficiency, and water conservation to the early childhood level (pre-kindergarten through second grade).

Toby Globy (a copy-righted, planet-shaped mascot that is also used in Laredo and Corpus Christi) is used as a spokesperson to convey environmental awareness. In January 2010 city staff visited schools to meet with officials and encourage them to include the program in their school curriculum, and subsequently to train teachers. As of January 2011, eleven had implemented the program.

Result/Product: Young children become aware of the importance of energy use, recycling, and water conservation.