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TCEQ photos

CENTRAL TEXAS ENVIRONMENTAL SUMMIT DRAWS 300

Schertz Event Marks Fourth and Final Environmental Summit for 2011

More than 300 Texas legislators, administrators, community leaders, environmentalists, and just plain citizens attended the first Central Texas Environmental Summit held Nov. 3 in Schertz. And although they met to discuss all the environmental issues along the I-35 corridor, two words dominated the discussions: drought and water.

Rep. John Kuempel, a sixth-generation Seguinite, kicked off the summit, saying that he was “pleased that the TCEQ recognized the uniqueness of our communities and provided the opportunity today for local individuals to identify important environmental issues, identify solutions, and, most importantly, implement those solutions.”

The Central Texas Environmental Summit was spearheaded by TCEQ

Commissioner Carlos Rubinstein. In the keynote addresses, Rubinstein told a standing-room-only crowd why he hosted the summit. He talked about El Paso, where the environmental summits started 11 years ago. “They were grassroots attempts to let people identify their own concerns, and identify ways that by working together they could fix them. They figured out that if they started out fixing what appeared to be the little problems first, then tackling the bigger problems became even easier.”

And today’s problem is the drought. “The drought that we are experiencing today is unlike any drought that any of us has ever seen. It may not be the drought of record yet, but we know it is the worst one-year drought we have ever seen in Texas,” he said.



Commissioner Rubinstein discusses environmental-science issues with students from Steele High School at the Schertz summit.

“San Antonio and this area have a remarkable way of dealing with the tougher issues. You have a lot to be proud of; we have a lot to learn from you. No other area of the state has been able to tackle and

Top row, l-r: (1) SAWS President Robert R. Puente speaking at the Central Texas Environmental Summit. (2) Commissioner Carlos Rubinstein being interviewed by Univision at the Valley Environmental Summit in McAllen. (3) Commissioner Buddy Garcia speaking at the Laredo Environmental Summit. (4) TCEQ staff member Jill Csekitz demonstrates a sediment sampler at the Central Texas Environmental Summit.



Speakers at the Central Texas Environmental Summit (l-r): Rep. John Kuempel, Rep. John V. Garza, Rep. Ruth Jones McClendon, Rep. Joaquin Castro, Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer, Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, and Rep. Doug Miller.

grasp its water problems better than San Antonio. I think you all lead in that effort.”

Rubinstein then introduced San Antonio Water System (SAWS) President Robert R. Puente, who urged water planners to remember that “water planning is not how much water you have, but how much water you have during a drought. The perfect blend for dealing with a drought is a combination of water conservation, managing the water you do have, and diversifying your supply.”

San Antonio has planned for the drought and encouraged conservation, he said. In the last 25 years, SAWS’ customer base increased by 67 percent, but the district is still using the same amount of water. He pointed out that San Antonio has the largest direct-recycled water system in the country, serving customers like Toyota and Microsoft. SAWS pumps out excess water from the Edwards Aquifer when permits allow it, and stores it in the nearby Carrizo Aquifer for use during dry times. SAWS has diversified its water supply from neighboring areas, and is building a desalination plant to take brackish water from the Wilcox Aquifer.

SAWS received the [TCEQ’s Environmental Excellence Award in 2011](#) for “saving tomorrow’s water today.”

Summit goers could attend town-hall meetings featuring senators and representatives, including Sen. Leticia Van de Putte, Rep. John V. Garza, Rep. Doug Miller, Rep. Joaquin Castro, Doug Jones from Rep. Jose Menendez’s office, Rep. Trey Martinez Fischer, and Rep. Ruth Jones McClendon.

Attendees also had the opportunity to visit nearly 30 exhibits, presented by numerous state and local agencies, including the Capitol Area Council of Governments, the LCRA, the TPWD, and the Edwards Aquifer Authority.

This is the fourth TCEQ environmental summit held this year.

The first was in El Paso on Oct. 7 and was attended by roughly 390 people. TCEQ Chairman Bryan W. Shaw, Ph.D., and Rubinstein hosted the event. The keynote speaker was U.S. Congressman Silvestre Reyes. Participants gathered in breakout sessions (solution sessions) to discuss environmental topics such as finding solutions for the illegal dumping of tires, which is a priority issue in the El Paso area. In addition, middle-school and high-school students contributed their ideas for solving local issues during a special youth program that focused on the disposal of plastic bags and glass bottles.

Hosted by TCEQ Commissioner Buddy Garcia, the second summit was held in Laredo on Oct. 20 and was attended by 230 people. Texas Senator Judith Zaffirini gave opening remarks during the morning program and Susan Ghertner, director of environmental affairs for HEB, delivered the keynote address at the luncheon. Participants joined breakout sessions to discuss their ideas for recycling and conservation in the Laredo area. Other summit presentations

included one by Glen Jarvis, water planning chairman of the Rio Grande Regional Water Planning Group, on Region M’s “50-year Water Plan and Water Conservation,” as well as presentations from other speakers on recycling activities conducted by AT&T and the City of Brownsville.

Rubinstein and Garcia hosted the third summit in McAllen on Oct. 28, with 210 people attending. Both TCEQ commissioners are from Brownsville and draw on personal experiences in the area to assist Valley leaders. In his keynote address during the luncheon, Garcia focused on specific environmental issues along the border, such as the illegal dumping of tires. Rep. Eddie Lucio III sponsored the event. In breakout sessions, participants discussed local issues of scrap tires, plastic bags, recycling, and water conservation. ♻️

Go to www.tceq.texas.gov/goto/outlook-1211 to see videos of the Central Texas Summit.



Commissioners Rubinstein and Garcia join State Senators Eddie Lucio Jr. and Juan “Chuy” Hinojosa, along with State Rep. Eddie Lucio III and other local elected officials, to address participants at the Valley summit in McAllen, Texas.



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