



Advice to Council No: 14-01

Re: Outputs from the JPAC Workshop in Oaxaca (May 2014) on Building Healthy and Sustainable Homes in Remote Communities

The Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) of the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) of North America:

IN ACCORDANCE with Article 16(4) of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC), which states that JPAC “may provide advice to Council on any matter within the scope of this agreement (...) and on the implementation and further elaboration of this agreement, and may perform such functions as the Council may direct;”

HAVING conducted a public workshop in Oaxaca, Mexico on 12–13 May 2014, entitled “Building Healthy and Sustainable Homes in Remote Communities: A Focus on Indigenous Communities in North America;”

HAVING reviewed the comments and recommendations of workshop expert panelists, which are provided in Appendix A to this Advice, and the comments and recommendations of participating members of the public, which are provided in Appendix B;

RECALLING the Council's designation of Healthy Communities and Ecosystems as one of three core priorities of the CEC's Strategic Plan for 2010–2015, with strategic objectives aimed at improved environmental health of vulnerable communities in North America, increased resilience of shared ecosystems at risk, an enhanced regional approach to sound management of chemicals, North American pollutant release and transfer registers, and strengthened regional environmental and wildlife law enforcement; and

SEEKING to provide constructive input regarding the attainment of these strategic objectives through the CEC's cooperative work program for 2013–2014;

SUBMITS the following observations and recommendations for Council's consideration:

1. A number of opportunities for building healthy and sustainable housing in remote communities, and, in particular, in indigenous communities, exist in common in North America. These opportunities include:
 - Taking an integral approach to promoting healthy and sustainable housing, which should include the consideration of water availability, conservation, and responsible use, as well as the identification and management of risks to water availability and quality. The inter-relation of water and energy concerns should also be recognized.

- Addressing misperceptions about the relative costs and benefits of investing in energy-conserving building methods, materials, and technologies when financing and building affordable housing. Understanding that the substantial long-term benefits of these investments often outweigh increased short-term construction costs can promote informed decisions to invest in conservation and sustainable housing;
 - Promoting greater awareness among relevant public authorities and constituencies about the importance and long-term value of sustainable and energy-conserving building methods, materials, and technologies that can and should be deployed in the context of affordable housing;
 - Encouraging greater coordination at a regional level to strengthen existing networks and to promote greater understanding of, information about, and technology sharing for, sustainable and energy-conserving building methods, materials, and technologies in North America; and
 - Recognizing that climate change has brought about, and will increasingly call for, the need for adaptation efforts. Some effects of climate change are forecast to be so severe that they may force the relocation of entire communities, with a particular impact on tribal and indigenous communities. It is important that relevant agencies in our three countries have the capacity to support relocation of affected communities where necessary due to the impact of climate change, and it is recommended that a legal framework for helping these communities adapt to climate change be developed. In the event of an eventual relocation, to the extent possible, the framework should address how to relocate in a manner that respects the group's cultural values and needs.
2. The two-year 2013–2014 CEC Operational Plan has yielded progress in elucidating the opportunities noted above and offering advice to the NAAEC Parties for pursuing them.
 3. The public dialogue on these issues held in Oaxaca, referenced above, has helped to advance broader public awareness of these opportunities and to clarify expert advice as well as civil society insights regarding how best to pursue these opportunities and overcome obstacles.
 4. We would respectfully recommend that the CEC continue its work on:
 - a. Advancing a more integrated concept of sustainable housing. This could include, for example, supporting regional strategies for outreach, incentives, and financing to promote green building, as well as strategies for exchanging technologies and best practices for sustainable production, use, and disposal of construction materials.
 - b. Emphasizing the substantial long-term savings that investments in energy- and water-efficient housing can bring relative to initial costs through:
 - i. Supplying public authorities and constituencies with relevant information; and
 - ii. Providing opportunities for relevant actors to build and strengthen networks throughout North America.

- c. Identifying energy and water risk areas and opportunities for adaptation.

JPAC is confident that the recommendations contained herein are highly relevant to the CEC Council's strategic priorities, and is unanimous in supporting this Advice to Council.

**Approved by the JPAC members
23 June 2014**