

CSM

Chemical Sensitivities Manitoba

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TOPIC: Topics for consideration by the Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) in the next 10 years.

The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) celebrates its 20th anniversary this year and considering its budgetary restraints, many of its goals have been successfully accomplished. With changes in the economy for all three countries, differences in political wills with respect to the environment, the increasing pressure for a more sustainable environment and the impacts of climate change, the CEC now has challenges that were not as apparent at the time of its inception.

If not already under consideration, the CEC may need to revisit its projects and possibly make some revisions so that these projects adequately address the current and common environmental needs of all three parties. Although the CEC projects are diverse in nature, consideration should also be given to new and emerging environmental issues that are of concern and relevant to all parties.

The following are some comments and recommendations for the Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) for consideration as the CEC looks towards future planning in the years ahead.

Comments and recommendations:

- **CEC visibility and outreach**

The projects and publications by the CEC are very relevant to many people in the environmental and health communities and also, the general public. As a result, the awareness of this valuable work needs to reach a broader audience as it would appear that this is not happening.

For example, the recent "Framework Document to Improve Environmental Health of Vulnerable Communities across N.A." is a meaningful approach to identifying and qualifying vulnerable populations and suggesting practical solutions or ways by which these populations can improve their environmental health. While this document has its merits, its dissemination to the appropriate organizations is

important. This is where the CEC has to consider how to effectively target groups or individuals who would have an interest in delivering the message.

More outreach with the community-at-large, possibly at public environmental events, could improve the awareness and work of the CEC. The concept of the three countries working together on environmental issues of common interest is a relevant and strong message for communities.

The awareness and importance of the submissions on the environmental enforcement process also need to be increased – the merits of such a system should be outlined.

While there is some outreach through webinars, the posting of reports online, and online participation for public meetings, a more concerted effort for further engagement through different channels/media is required. This should not be viewed as lobbying but rather, a way to educate, engage and improve awareness of environmental issues that affect the three nations.

Recommendation: The CEC should work at increasing its visibility through existing networks that are relevant to the project.

Recommendation: Increase outreach and visibility at universities and colleges that have strong and well known environmental programs that are compatible with the current objectives of the CEC.

Recommendation: The participation of the CEC at some select, public events so that its work could be highlighted.

- **CEC funding**

The current funding for the CEC by each government is inadequate as public outreach and the capacity of some of its projects require expanding. Also, additional funding would be required if new projects are initiated.

Increased funding would also allow the CEC to increase its capacity to work with other organizations, including NGOs, on some projects because of common goals.

Recommendation: All countries should consider an increase in funding for the CEC as this would result in improving the effectiveness and outreach capabilities of the organization.

- **Viable energy source**

With emphasis on Mexico, the introduction of solar power could potentially improve education resources for children in rural areas, and in particular, if there is no power source. This proposal is aimed at simple projects like introducing limited power supplies for small rural schools where computers could be used as complementary teaching aids. Solar energy could also supply energy for water pumps and lighting in schools.

This type of project could be accomplished by working together with local organizations. There are similar projects in some parts of Africa.

Recommendation: The CEC to consider how small rural villages with schools in Mexico, could benefit from the introduction of solar power.

- **Climate change preparedness**

This takes into consideration what communities have to do in order to be better prepared for extreme weather events as well as being prepared for the raising of water levels along coastal areas.

Mexico and the United States share the Gulf of Mexico and some communities around the Gulf have similar environmental issues such as coastline erosion resulting from the rising of water levels. This has the potential to affect towns and cities not only on the coastline but also inland, depending on topography. The effects of over-development in coastal areas by the removal of swamps and mangrove whether for tourism, oil exploration, or other developments, have also put some coastal areas at risk for intense flooding.

The CEC is in a position to monitor a few very vulnerable locations and with the help of local governments, educate communities on the need for emergency preparedness plans. This also relates to the issue of building sustainable communities with respect to the environment - how can local governments ensure that new development is not at the cost of the environment.

Recommendation: The CEC to determine a few locations around the Gulf of Mexico that are extremely vulnerable with respect to flooding and work with local officials to ensure that there are emergency preparedness plans.

- **Smart management of chemicals**

There has been work on chemicals of mutual concern for all three countries (e.g. lindane, DDT, mercury, dioxins, furans and flame retardants (polybrominated diphenyl ethers – PBDEs). With some of these chemicals falling under

international agreements for worldwide chemical reduction and phase out, there could be increased efforts for the three countries to investigate and initiate plans for chemicals like flame retardants – how they contaminate shared waste streams or re-enter the consumer market through the recycle stream. For example, recycled foam containing PBDEs are being used in consumer products while PBDEs are being phased out.¹ PBDEs are found in older furniture and other consumer products and are generally present in house dust but possibly at higher concentrations in dwellings of the lower income population.

Another group of chemicals that should be of concern to all three countries is perfluorinated compounds. These chemicals are relatively pervasive in our environment and can be found in many consumer and industrial products. Because of their environmental persistence and potential to do harm to human health, some consideration could be given to the identification of the most commonly used perfluorinated compounds in Mexico and where they are most likely to be found. This should be followed by biomonitoring and environmental monitoring for the identified perfluorinated compounds.

Recommendation: The CEC should consider the expansion of its works on PBDEs to include the investigation, quantification of PBDEs in the recycle stream of products and in shared waste streams and based on the data obtained, make recommendations so that the presence of PBDEs in waste streams and recycled products would be eliminated or reduced.

Recommendation: Consideration to be given to the identification and monitoring of the most commonly used perfluorinated compounds used in Mexico.

- **Webinars**

The CEC webinars are excellent in communicating environmental issues and/or data to the public. They have been informative and not lengthy in duration so that are appropriate form of engagement for many. However, they should not be the alternative for longer public face-to-face meetings.

Recommendation: The CEC should continue the webinars with topics that are relevant to the public. Depending on resources and the availability of presenters, the number of webinars could be increased.

¹ DiGangi, J., Stravoka, J. International POPs Elimination Network. A Survey of PBDEs in recycling carpet padding. 2011.

- **NGO participation in meetings**

NGOs want to participate in the public meetings and possibly attend some of the public sessions. However, many NGOs require funding, and in particular the small organizations, who want to actively participate in the CEC activities but do not have the resources to do so. There is concern that the short time for booking airline tickets, prior to departure, for a meeting, possibly does not result in the most efficient use of the limited available financial resources. Although the public can participate in these meetings by webinar, face-to-face participation is preferred in some cases.

Recommendation: The CEC should allow sufficient time to make travel arrangements for meetings so that cheaper transport fares could be used. This can be partially achieved by decreasing the registration time for applicants.

- **NGO representation on JPAC**

At present, public interest groups, including non-governmental organizations, are not represented on JPAC (all three countries). This does not represent a truly balanced committee considering the role of the JPAC is a liaison to the public and the environmental agenda of the CEC.

Recommendation: Consideration should be given to the inclusion of a NGO from each country on JPAC.

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