Pollution in the environment can have significant effects on human health. However, some individuals, or even groups of people, are more vulnerable to health risks from exposure to environmental contamination. Many variables directly or indirectly influence these health effects. For example, air pollutants can trigger asthma among the very young and very old, as well as in individuals who have a family history of asthma, or aggravate existing respiratory and cardiac conditions. Many environmental health risks are preventable or can be mitigated. Public access to a wide range of information—such as data on pollutant emissions and ambient air quality conditions—is instrumental to reduce the risk of exposure for individuals and vulnerable communities.

This project has two capacity-building components. One involves the development of a framework document, building on existing risk assessment tools and information, to assist communities in the identification of potential health risks associated with environmental pollution. The purpose of the framework is to put forth the factors that need to be considered in the characterization of an individual's or community's vulnerability to the health consequences posed by environmental contamination. Once completed, this framework document is intended to be used as the foundation for the development of different types of products that provide individuals throughout North America the capacity to make more informed decisions about how to protect their health from environmental contaminants.

The second capacity building component supports the implementation of AirNow-International in Mexico, with the purpose of providing the capability to inform the public
about air quality conditions that can impact human health. The AirNow-International system, already in use in the United States and Canada, is a platform for the management and quality assurance of ambient air monitoring data for the purposes of providing the public and decision makers with easy access to information on local air quality conditions.

The project promotes increased awareness of environmental health risks among all stakeholders, including the most vulnerable communities, in the pursuit of community-based initiatives to reduce risks from and exposure to environmental pollution.

Related CEC Initiatives
This project will share information with the CEC’s Tracking Pollutant Releases and Transfers in North America project and the Risk Reduction Strategies to Reduce Exposure to Chemicals of Mutual Concern project.

Partners
A multi-stakeholder advisory group, including nongovernmental organizations, government, industry, and community organizations will be established to support the development of a framework document. The implementation of AirNow-International in Mexico will involve the participation of the US EPA, Environment Canada, and Mexico’s Semarnat and Instituto Nacional de Ecología.

About the CEC
The Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) was established by the governments of Canada, Mexico and the United States through the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation, the environmental side agreement to NAFTA. An intergovernmental organization, the CEC is composed of a Council of cabinet-level environmental officials from the three countries, a Joint Public Advisory Committee and a Secretariat that provides operational support for cooperative work between the three countries. The organization brings together citizens and experts from governments, nongovernmental organizations, scientists, researchers and businesses to seek solutions to protect North America’s shared environment while supporting sustainable economic development.

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For the complete project descriptions, see: www.cec.org/projects.