



SEMARNAT

U.S.-MÉXICO ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM: BORDER 2012 IMPROVING CHILDREN’S HEALTH WINTER-SPRING 2011

CHILDREN MAKE UP APPROXIMATELY ONE THIRD OF THE POPULATION IN THE BORDER. THEY NEED CLEAN AIR TO BREATHE, CLEAN WATER TO DRINK, SAFE FOOD TO EAT, AND A HEALTHY ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH TO LEARN, GROW AND THRIVE. YET EVERY DAY THEY ARE EXPOSED TO ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS THAT MAY STAND IN THE WAY OF THOSE BASIC NECESSITIES. PROTECTING CHILDREN FROM ENVIRONMENTAL RISKS IS FUNDAMENTAL TO THE U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY (EPA) AND MEXICO’S SECRETARIA DE MEDIO AMBIENTE Y RECURSOS NATURALES (SEMARNAT), EFFORTS TO MAKE THE WORLD A HEALTHIER PLACE, FOR PRESENT AND FUTURE GENERATIONS.

Integrated Pesticide Illness Surveillance and Education to benefit Workers and Children along the Border.

Agriculture is Imperial Valley’s second largest industry. It is successful thanks to the thousands of workers who labor in the fields each year. Due to the use of pesticides and other chemicals in the agricultural industry, many cases of pesticide illnesses surface each year prompting the State of California to establish a pesticide illness surveillance and tracking system in 1971. The success of this system depends on both healthcare providers reporting cases that they encounter and farm workers seeking healthcare for their symptoms.



This reporting system becomes challenged along the U.S.-Mexico Border when a large number of farm workers visit healthcare providers in Mexico. In addition to worker exposure, unless precaution is taken, workers can unknowingly take contaminated clothing home and expose other family members and children to pesticides as well. According to the Census Bureau, 30.8% of Imperial County’s population is under age 18.

To address many of these issues, in 2008, a Border 2012 grant was awarded jointly to the California Department of Public Health’s California Office of Bi-national Border Health (COBBH) and the Baja California Health Services Institute (ISESALUD in Spanish) to increase the reporting of pesticide illness and unsafe working conditions for agricultural workers and to inform them about their rights and available resources regarding pesticide exposure and unsafe working conditions. The project focused on developing a bi-national pesticide illness surveillance protocol, conducting a series of trainings for healthcare providers on both sides of the border, and

pesticide outreach and education for workers in Imperial County.

The successes of this project:

- Developed a protocol to facilitate communication between Mexicali and Imperial County on bi-national cases of pesticide illness (being finalized).
- Held trainings for healthcare providers in El Centro, Heber, and Coachella with videoconference participation from three community clinics in Imperial and Riverside Counties as well as three trainings in Mexicali and Tecate.
- Created a radio public service announcement for farm workers in Spanish and in two different Mexican indigenous languages, which aired 320 times in Mexicali in May and June 2010.
- Created and distributed 3,300 award-winning wallet size information cards, hung 60 posters and 100 flyers and conducted face-to-face farm worker outreach to 2,200 people in 6 cities.
- Collaborated with numerous key stakeholders which led to the success of this project.

For additional information about this project please call COBBH at (619) 688-6483.

Increasing Awareness and Participation on Children's Environmental Health Issues.

Young people have special concerns and responsibilities that relate to our environment and their engagement is important towards generating effective responses towards environmental challenges. Laredo, Texas is located on the north bank of the Rio Grande River and maintains a population of 236,941 residents of which 36 percent are under the age of 18 and 11 percent are under the age of 5 years of age. Over the years Laredo has experience an



array of environmental problems dealing with the issues of water quality, watershed management, household hazardous waste and air quality. Recognizing the importance of education and that

outreach serve as efforts to protect the environment the City of Laredo has begun efforts to educate the community, specifically within children, on environmental issues. The message needed to be clearer as to "why children are different" when it comes to environmental health and what type of actions parents can take to protect their families. Through the leveraging of funds from EPA's Border 2012 Program, the City of Laredo was able to develop educational materials such as a "Guide to a Healthy Home" and "Greening Cleaning, Recipes for a Clean Environment" targeted to outreach to parents of children who were enrolled in local schools and childcare centers between the ages of 3-10 years.

In joint effort to create an integrated approach towards addressing the issues of public health and the environment, the City of Laredo Health Department, the Environmental Services Department and EPA partnered up collectively to launch a children's health outreach effort. The goal of the effort was to build capacity and increase knowledge of current children's health issues and combative strategies through workshops. The workshops were designed as train the trainer workshops and youth workshops centered on emerging children's environmental health issues such as natural resource conservation, household hazardous waste (HHW), recycling, air quality and asthma, indoor air quality, and water. The overall message was to explain to the community that children are more vulnerable to environmental exposures

than adults because they are in a constant stage of development. The audience for the training and youth workshops included the medical community with the Laredo Medical Center and Pediatric clinics, the nursing staff within the Laredo Independent School District (LISD), and the Promotoras.

A total of 9 schools within the LISD and United Independent School District (UISD) received the training for youth workshops. It was attended by 51 participants ranging from outreach workers, the medical community, family counselors and school district custodians and by 5,170 elementary students and 195 parents in the Even Start Program. As a result the program has generated an enthusiasm for learning about healthier lifestyles for themselves and for their families and serves as a model for success.

Bi-national Cooperation for Safeguarding Bi-Coastal Waters for Healthy Beaches in San Diego and Tijuana.

The Tijuana River Watershed (TRW) is one of the fastest growing regions along the border between the U.S. and Mexico stretching about 1750



square miles and consisting of industrial, agricultural, rural, and open space land. The constant presence of pollutants, such as heavy metals and oil, pollute the wastewater and create health hazards for drinking water and the coastal environment, particularly in beaches. This type of pollution creates a high risk for local and U.S. visitors. With a population of over 1.5 million people, approximately 30% of them children, the beaches in Tijuana are one of the most important recreational, free open spaces

for children to visit.

With support from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Border 2012 Program federal, state and local agencies worked with the *Proyecto Fronterizo de Educacion Ambiental A.C. (PFEA)* a non-governmental organization in Mexico, to develop a project raising public awareness about environmental health issues related to coastal water quality. This addresses Goal 1, Objective 3 (monitoring of coastal water quality in beaches), of the Border 2012 Program. The project consisted of bi-national environmental education workshops, environmental education curriculum for middle and high schools students, and created an electronic newsletter and web page. This was the first time that multi-stakeholders from both the US and Mexico met to address issues on bi-coastal water quality.

PFEA also organized 3 beach cleanup events in which an estimated 9,000 volunteers collected approximately 28,000 lbs (13,000 kilos) of trash, including over 30,000 cigarette butts and 10,000 plastic bags, keeping this trash from eventually entering the Pacific Ocean. Overall, the project strengthened bi-national constituency through communication with the "Clean Beach Committees", including federal, state and municipal agencies concerning water quality issues. As a result of these efforts, the beaches are safer and the children who visit them have acquired an understanding and are better informed about the need to keep their beaches clean.

Improving Environmental Health Through Community Building.

Human exposure to pesticides can occur through residues found in food and water and drift from agricultural activities. However the majority of these pesticides are found within common household products. This presents a potential

Hazard to young children because children frequently come into contact with pesticides through various forms of residue unwittingly brought into the home by various actors: parents, siblings or other extended family members. Generally, these substances can be traced to both clothing and skin/hair of individuals who have been in recent contact with ground, water or airborne pesticide residue. Such take-homes exposures put children at serious risk for acute and chronic illnesses. In a study conducted in 2000 by the Migrant Health Program under the Bureau of Primary Health Care, Texas had the second most farm workers of any state within the U.S. In addition, Hidalgo County, with a population of 569,463 residents (2000 U.S. Census) led all the counties, within the state of Texas, by having the most migrant and seasonal farm workers with approximately 40,500 farm workers. Statewide it was estimated that the number of children and youth (under 20 years of age) of both migrant and seasonal workers was approximately 129,591.



Through a coalition of partners such as the Association of Farm worker Opportunities Program, the Basilica of Our Lady of San Juan del Valle, the Edinburg Children's Hospital, and the UT-Pan American Youth Council, along with the support from Border 2012, the Pesticides Awareness Theatre was created in order to education and bring forth the issues concerning pesticide use and impacts on children's health.

The play of *"El Moscas y Los Pesticidas"* is an interactive play designed to increase safety awareness for family and individuals who live and work in areas that have been treated with pesticides, while at the same time educate their understanding of take-home and in-home

pesticide exposure risks. The project addresses Goal 4 Improve Environmental Health of the Border 2012 Program.

On October 23, 2010, *"El Moscas y Los Pesticidas"* was performed before an audience over 700 community members of San Juan, Texas, delivering awareness on the following: worker safety requirements, basic self-help actions on improving worker safety and family exposure, health impacts to adults and children, and tips on identifying and minimizing pesticide use.

For additional information about this play or for a copy of the script and tools required to replicate it in your community, please visit our website: www.epa.gov/region6/water/beyondtranslation/2009/elmoscas.html

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THE
U.S.-MÉXICO ENVIRONMENTAL
PROGRAM: BORDER 2012, VISIT THE
FOLLOWING WEBSITES:**

USEPA:

www.epa.gov/border2012

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