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U.S.-Mexico Border XXI Program

The Border XXI Program is a binational, interagency program aimed at protecting and improving the environment and environmental health, while fostering sustainable development in the U.S.-Mexico border area. The objectives of the Border XXI Program include public involvement, decentralization of border decision making, and increased cooperation between the different governmental agencies operating in the border region. The program is implemented through nine binational Workgroups that integrate the efforts of other participating entities and define specific projects to achieve the Program's objectives. The Workgroups are committed to encouraging active state participation in their endeavors and exploring additional mechanisms to promote border community participation and integrated regional planning.

The six Workgroups (1-6 below) that were initiated under the La Paz Agreement are (1) water, (2) air, (3) hazardous and solid waste, (4) pollution prevention, (5) contingency planning and emergency response, and (6) cooperative enforcement and compliance. Recognizing that the environment needs to be considered from a comprehensive perspective, Border XXI integrates three new Workgroups. These are (7) environmental information resources, (8) natural resources, and (9) environmental health.

The Environmental Health Workgroup is lead by health and environmental officials on both sides of the border. For the U.S., Richard Walling serves as the "health" Co-Chair, and Ginny Gidi is the senior staff member and point of contact for the project within the office. Hal Zenick, Associate Director for Health of the National Health and Environmental Effects Research Laboratory of the EPA serves as the "environment" Co-Chair.

The Environmental Health Workgroup seeks to increase binational collaboration between environmental and public health entities to improve the health of border communities. These collaborative efforts should improve the workgroup's ability to identify and address the environmental conditions that pose the highest health risks. The goal of the workgroup is to address environmental health concerns in order to reduce exposures and other factors

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associated with the increase in disease rates along the border.

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