



Baja California & California on Air Quality

On Friday, October 16, the Border Legislative Conference (BLC) hosted a binational virtual legislative exchange focused on air quality along the California and Baja California border region. California Assemblymember Jose Medina, chair of the BLC, kicked off the session by highlighting the importance of the binational relationship between California and Baja California and the need to collaborate on issues of mutual concern such as air quality. Thereafter, California Assemblymember Eduardo Garcia, whose district includes the border region, facilitated the session.

The panelists included:

- Ryan M. Atencio, Border Affairs Coordinator at the California Air Resources Board (CARB)
- Saul Guzman Garcia, Director of Environmental Management at the Ministry of Sustainable Development in Baja California
- Luis Olmedo, Executive Director of the Comité Cívico del Valle, Inc.
- Alberto Mexia, Director Foundation for Air Quality Research (REDSPIRA)
- Nathan Fletcher, San Diego County Board of Supervisors, District 4

A few key takeaways from the session include:

- The Baja California and California shared border region stretches from the Pacific Ocean to the Colorado River and is connected by common cultural history, familial ties, ecological resources, and shared economies. The region has experienced rapid growth of people and trade which is expediting small- and large-scale environmental issues unique to the area, exposing vulnerable communities to air pollution.



- Air does not recognize a border which is why joint efforts and coordination to address clean air for the shared communities is vital. Concerns about the air quality are growing on both sides of the border as a result of agricultural burning, unpaved roads, clandestine burning of used tires, and other factors that have contributed to increased pollution.
- In Baja California, the maquiladoras, which are manufacturing operations or factories, have generated a substantial amount of waste and deterioration of natural resources. Low-cost air quality monitoring is being implemented, but such efforts are in their infancy. More recently, Mexicali's air quality was impacted by the destructive fires in California and Colorado. Baja California officials underscored the importance of protecting the environment; Representative Maria Vaca Chacon emphasized that "a healthy clean environment is a fundamental human right fundamental on both sides."
- A collective sentiment from the California participants is that while U.S. federal support has been provided from a holistic perspective, commitment to support a community-focused and equitable approach has been under supported. California communities have had increased access to low-cost sensors resulting in improved community monitoring over the past several years. And through legislation ([AB 617](#)) that requires CARB to implement emission reduction strategies of toxic air contaminants in communities affected by a high cumulative exposure to pollutants. But the environmental impacts of macro-industrial agriculture and vehicles entering the state without meeting standards continue to increase toxic air. In 2019, it was reported that 43 percent of trucks inspected crossing into California violated CARB requirements.



- Challenges on both sides of the border include access to real-time data and follow-up on provided information, border wait times and vehicle congestion, lack of a collective binational protocol of rules and regulations, insufficient funding of environmental efforts, and failure to comply with regulations and inspections.
- Over the past several years the voices behind environmental concerns and justice have been amplified. CARB, the United States Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the San Diego-Tijuana Air Quality Task Force, community stakeholders and representatives from Baja California are all committed to restoring the air quality along the border region. However, increased pollution requires greater resources and urgency. Leaders on both sides of the border agree that it's time to put conversation into action and work hand in hand, with the communities to address these concerns.

Assemblymember Garcia concluded the meeting by reiterating that “the relationship between [the U.S.] and Mexico is critical” and adding that “there is no border big enough or tall enough that gets in the way of making sure that we address these issues.”

Did you miss the binational discussion between Baja California and California on air quality? An on-demand video of the session is available on the CSG West website. Interested in additional sessions? Be sure to visit the [Legislative Exchange Series](#) page for upcoming virtual gatherings.