

REGIONAL AIR QUALITY PLANNING ADVISORY COMMITTEE

MEETING SUMMARY

Thursday, March 30, 2023 – 10:00 A. M.

Houston-Galveston Area Council

Virtual Teams Meeting

MEMBER PRESENT

City of Houston – Win Colbert
Fort Bend County – Joel Patterson
Waller County – Brooke Bacuetes
Harris County Pollution Control – Latrice Babin
Harris County Precinct 2 – Kristin Lee
Harris County – Winifred Hamilton
Environmental Defense Fund – Grace Lewis
Exxon – Edmund Petry
ECHMA – Mary Jane Mudd
City of Texas City – Gary Scoggin

ALTERNATE PRESENT

TxDOT – Charles Airiohuodion
Houston Advanced Research Center – Ebrahim Eslami
City of Houston – Darryl Tate
Harris County – Pernell Davis
Harris County Pollution Control – Stuart Mueller
League of Women’s Voters – Katie Campbell

OTHERS PRESENT

HNTB – Michael Copeland
DRI – John Mejia

STAFF PRESENT

Houston-Galveston Area Council – Andrew DeCandis
Houston-Galveston Area Council – Cassandra Marshall
Houston-Galveston Area Council – Jochen Floesser
Houston-Galveston Area Council – Graciela Lubertino
Houston-Galveston Area Council – Pramod Sambidi
Houston-Galveston Area Council – Carrie Evans
Houston-Galveston Area Council – Craig Raborn
Houston-Galveston Area Council – Caroline Bailey
Houston-Galveston Area Council – Maria Theresa Servillon-Sigua
Environmental Protection Agency – Jeff Riley
TCEQ – Vanessa De Arman

BRIEFING

Overview

- a. RAQPAC Members and Alternates were presented with agency reports (EPA update, TCEQ update, and Regional Air Quality Monitoring update), and the meeting concluded with no information items and no announcements.
- b. Go to <http://www.h-gac.com/board-of-directors/advisory-committees/regional-air-quality-planning-advisory-committee/meeting-material.aspx> to view the meeting materials for this meeting.

CALL TO ORDER

ITEM 1A. Introduction

Grace Lewis called the meeting to order, and members were introduced.

ITEM 1B. Approval of Meeting Summary (01-26-2023)

Quorum not met.

AGENCY REPORTS

ITEM 2A. EPA Update (Jeff Riley)

A representative from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) briefed the committee:

Reconsideration of the EPA's December 2020 Decision to Retain 2012 Particulate Matter (PM) National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS)

On January 6, 2023, EPA Administrator Regan signed the Agency's proposed decision to strengthen the primary (health-based) annual PM_{2.5} standard from the current level of 12.0 µg/m³ to within a range of 9.0 to 10.0 µg/m³. (soliciting comment low as 8 µg/m³, high as 11 µg/m³). EPA also proposed not to change the current:

- The secondary (or welfare-based) annual PM_{2.5} standard,
- The primary and secondary 24-hour PM_{2.5} standards (current level 35 µg/m³, EPA is soliciting comment on revising level to as low as 25 µg/m³), and
- The primary and secondary PM₁₀ standards.

In addition, EPA proposed revisions to other key aspects related to the PM NAAQS, including revisions to the Air Quality Index (AQI) to improve public communications about PM risks (revised breakpoints of good, moderate, unhealthy for sensitive groups, etc. based on proposed revised levels), and revisions to monitoring network design criteria to require monitoring in at-risk communities with anticipated effects from sources in the area contributing to poor air quality.

EPA's [informational webpage](#) contains the [signed & published proposed decision](#), as well as:

- Fact sheets detailing the proposed revisions.
- [Maps of counties](#) not currently meeting lower annual NAAQS values (at 9 & 10 µg/m³ based on 2019-2021 monitoring data), and.
- An [overview presentation](#) providing a summary of the proposal and other PM information.

The proposed decision was published in the Federal Register on January 27, 2023, with a 60-day public comment period (January 27 – March 28). Public hearings will be held mid-late February (likely) and announced through a separate Federal Register document providing specific dates, times, and contact information for the hearings. After close of the comment period, EPA will work to respond to comments and issue a final rulemaking which would determine if & how the PM NAAQS would be revised. Final rulemaking is anticipated late 2023/early 2024. In the event of a revised PM NAAQS, the final rulemaking begins a 2-year process of designating areas nonattainment (1 year for state recommendations, 2nd year for EPA evaluation & designations).

DERA Grants 2022-2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity

On January 17, 2023, EPA [announced](#) that the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act/(DERA) National Grants 2022-2023 Notice of Funding Opportunity is expected to open early 2023, although the exact opening date is currently to be determined. More information & specifics are forthcoming and will be shared with RAQPAC as soon as available to allow the Houston area to take full advantage of the funding opportunity.

Of note: the DERA National Grants are moving to a 2-year competition cycle, in order to reduce the administrative workload associated with grant competitions for both applicants and EPA. EPA anticipates that the change will facilitate long term planning and budgeting for our applicants and allow for more realistic project timelines, thereby reducing the need for amendments and extensions later in the funded project.

AVERT 4.0 Introductory Webinar, January 31, 2023: New functionality to analyze the energy, emissions, and equity impacts of electric vehicles

Join EPA for a [webinar](#) on January 31st at 1PM ET to learn about a major update to the [Avoided Emissions and generation Tool](#) (AVERT), a free tool designed to evaluate greenhouse gas (GHG) and other pollutant emissions from the power sector displaced by energy efficiency and renewable energy (EE/RE) policies and programs.

The update consists of an expanded version—titled AVERT 4.0—which responds to stakeholder interest in quantifying the emission impacts of electric vehicles (EVs). AVERT 4.0 can now model the “tailpipe to smokestack” energy and emissions impacts of EVs. With these capabilities, the tool helps users to model EVs and EE/RE together as a portfolio, demonstrating the impact and importance of deploying multiple energy strategies together. Results from AVERT 4.0 are presented at county, state, and regional level, which can be easily exported into EPA’s [COBRA](#), or the Co-Benefits Risk Assessment air quality & health impacts screening & mapping tool. With these two tools together, model results can help demonstrate how energy policies and programs can meet air quality, health, equity, and economic goals.

Speakers:

- Alejandra Nunez, Deputy Assistant Administrator for Mobile Sources, US EPA Office of Air and Radiation
- Colby Tucker, Senior Policy Analyst, US EPA State and Local Climate and Energy Program
- Pat Knight, Senior Principal, Synapse Energy Economics, Inc.

2023 EJ Collaborative Problem-Solving Cooperative Agreement Program (EJCPS) Request for Applications

EPA is soliciting applications for projects that support community-based nonprofit organizations (CBOs) in their collaboration with other stakeholders (e.g., local businesses and industry, local government, medical service providers, academia, etc.) to develop solutions that significantly address environmental or public health issue(s) in communities disproportionately burdened by environmental harms. This competition is being launched to meet the goals and objectives of the Biden Administration’s Executive Orders 14008 & 13985, demonstrating EPA’s and the Administration’s commitment to achieving environmental justice and embedding environmental justice into Agency programs. For more information, see [EPA’s informational webpage](#).

To apply for this opportunity, [view the RFA on Grants.gov](#). Applications packages must be submitted on or before April 10, 2023, at 11:59 PM (Eastern Time). Applicants should plan for projects to begin on October 1, 2023.

ITEM 2B. TCEQ Update (Vanessa De Arman)

TCEQ staff gave an update to the members on the latest information:

PM_{2.5} NAAQS Proposal Released on January 6

Using preliminary data, TCEQ reviewed the 2022 PM_{2.5} design values relative to the proposed new annual standard. Based on this analysis, Harris and Montgomery Counties could potentially be impacted by the new standard.

TCEQ is coordinating virtual outreach meetings for these counties. If you would like to be included in these meetings, please contact Vanessa De Arman at vanessa.dearman@tceq.texas.gov or at 512-239-5609.

2023 Environmental Trade Fair and Conference (ETFC)

The ETFC will be held May 16-17, 2023, at the Austin Convention Center. During the two-day ETFC, Agency staff will lead over 100 courses and discussions. Topics include air and water permitting, oil and gas, industrial and solid waste management, compliance and enforcement, and remediation programs.

Attendee and exhibitor registration is now open. For more information, please visit the Environmental Trade Fair and Conference webpage (<https://www.tceq.texas.gov/@p2/events/etfc/etf.html>).

ITEM 2D. Regional Air Quality Monitoring Update (Andrew DeCandis)

Since our last meeting in January, there have been no exceedances of the 2008 75 ppb ground-level ozone standard or 2015 70 ppb standard.

So far, this year, the region’s maximum 4th highest value remains at 60 ppb located at the Houston Baytown Garth monitor. Moving on, the current regional design value for the 2021 through 2023 and that is including part full data for

2021 and 2022 remains at 72 ppb as measured at the Houston Bayland Park monitor. So, each result already exceeded the 75 ppb standard for the current year.

Moving on, to PM 2.5, you can see our most recent 12 months of PM data for all our recent regulatory monitors. We also have the current annual concentrations for these monitors within the region going back to 2001

ACTION ITEMS

ITEM 3A.

None

DISCUSSION ITEMS

ITEM 4A. Cooling Mitigation Strategies for Galveston Houston Area- (John Mejia, Desert Research Institute)

John Mejia gave an overview to the members on the cooling mitigation strategies for Galveston, Houston area. Discussion continued with identifiable synergies and tradeoffs. A cloud fraction feels, highlighting that the contour of the city has more clouds. This is new to many the city itself and hence mixing in the vertical because it's a warmer environment and that creates more frequent shallow cumulus clouds. It was further discussed that you will see how cooling the city affects the city and how the trade offs in air quality can occur anyways. The detailed information about the hot spot in the city, we can do a lot with this data, including evaluating the models, and constraining the models. Discussion continued with joining forces with HARC to address issues with excessive heat in urban environments. The National Weather Service in Houston and also with the city of Houston as an effort to amplify what to do besides, we wanted to work closely with the practitioners so they can shape out the work were doing and our outcomes to be a little bit more tangible to the activities and the National Weather Service and the City of Houston are developing in relation to heat.

ITEM 4B. Climate Pollution Reduction Grants – (Andrew DeCandis, H-GAC)

Staff gave an update on the climate pollution reduction grants that were created as part of the Inflation Reduction Act. It should be an act, not grant. The purpose is to develop and implement plans, reducing greenhouse emissions and other harmful air pollutants. Discussion continued that this program will be administered by the EPA in two phases, but we are only focusing on phase one. It will be 250 million that will be available for non- competitive planning grants. It was further discussed that the funding announcement will be next year or in 2025. This will offer \$4.6 billion in competitive implementation grants. There are two separate tracks for this. There's \$3million that will be available to each state that includes DC, Puerto Rico. Also, \$ 1,000,000 available for each of the 67 most popular metropolitan statistical area is the 5th largest in the nation. We are in line as a region to receive \$1,000.000.

To be eligible for the \$4.6 billion in implementation grants that are going to be available in phase two. Proposed projects must be covered by either state or MSA phase one planning grant. As a region, if we want to have any chance of getting any of that \$6.4/\$6.7 million in the future, we have got to work on this phase.

As for as eligibility is concerned, the regions EPA requires that an eligible entity be the lead applicant on behalf of an entire MSA to encourage regional climate planning, so when that is submitted there, the lead agency needs support letters.

INFORMATION ITEMS

ITEM 5A. H-GAC Update

None

ANNOUNCEMENTS

ITEM 6A.

None.

NEW BUSINESS

ITEM 7A.

Next meeting: April 27, 2023

ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 11:27A.M.