



Joint Public Advisory Committee

Assuring Public Participation

The creation of the CEC set a precedent among international environmental institutions by integrating public involvement at the highest decision-making level. The Joint Public Advisory Committee (JPAC) is a public nongovernmental group with equal representation from the three countries.

The **Joint Public Advisory Committee** is one of the three partners that constitute the CEC, with the Council and the Secretariat. As a group of 15 volunteer citizens, five appointed by each country, JPAC sees itself a microcosm of the public: independent individuals who contribute diverse but rich institutional experience and cultural perspectives.

During negotiations for the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), citizens, public interest groups, and environmental organizations brought the issue of the environmental effects of liberalized trade into the free trade debate, a debate that eventually led to the negotiation of the side agreement NAAEC and the creation of CEC.

The mandate of JPAC is to provide advice to the Council on any matter within the scope of the North American Agreement on Environmental Cooperation (NAAEC). JPAC ensures that the views of the North American public are taken into account when formulating its advice to Council. This commitment to public participation makes the CEC unique and provides a model for other international organizations.

Public Meetings

JPAC meets four times a year in different locations within the three countries, typically in conjunction with special CEC events, such as a workshop on understanding the linkages between trade and the environment or a symposium on electricity and the environment. These meetings are usually followed by a regular session of JPAC where the public has the opportunity to focus on matters under immediate consideration by the CEC. One meeting is held in conjunction with the CEC Council's annual regular session.

An Independent Approach

JPAC also acts in its own right as group of experienced and concerned North American citizens to bring issues to Council's attention. Since 1994, the Committee has made several calls for public comment on specific topics and has made important advice to Council and the Secretariat, contributing to the CEC's work.

“Our vision is to promote **continental cooperation** in ecosystem protection and sustainable economic development, and to ensure **active public participation** and transparency in the actions of the commission.”

- *JPAC Vision Statement*,
July 1994

JPAC has helped pave the way for public participation in:

- reviewing and improving the draft CEC program plans and budgets;
- promoting the need to consult the public on trade and environment mechanisms including negotiations towards transboundary environmental impact assessment and on Article 10(6) of the NAAEC;
- supporting progress on environmental initiatives related to the electricity market;
- supporting the CEC's role in gathering and coordinating information about biodiversity and developing a strategic plan to implement common mechanisms in the three countries;
- expanding involvement of North American public including indigenous peoples in biodiversity conservation;
- promoting the importance of the North American Regional Action Plans (NARAP) of the Sound Management of Chemicals program;
- encouraging capacity building and public education in areas where the CEC has made important steps forward such as NARAPs;
- highlighting the importance of emissions reporting and the public's right to information regarding pollutant releases and transfers on a continental basis;
- advising on the importance of children's health and their vulnerability to air and water pollution;
- increasing cooperative work to improve air emissions problems related to North American Trade and Transportation Corridors;
- facilitating the development of market mechanisms to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in North America;
- reviewing guidelines on Environmental Management Systems;
- setting up guidelines for the North American Fund for Environmental Cooperation (NAFEC);
- designing the Framework for Public Participation in CEC Activities; and
- improving the public portion of the Council session.

JPAC has also devoted much effort to its role in the process of Citizen Submissions on Enforcement Matters, established by Articles 14 and 15 of NAAEC. This process allows citizens from any of the three countries to file a complaint to the CEC if they believe that the national government is not adequately enforcing domestic environmental legislation. JPAC considers the Citizen Submission process as a cornerstone of the CEC's work, and continues its efforts to make the process more effective, equitable and open. Over the past years, JPAC has formatted the draft guidelines, offered public workshops, and given milestone advice and reports to Council on lessons learned from the process to date.

The public is invited to join JPAC in building a sustainable society in North American by attending its meetings or sending comments on the CEC program as a whole, or any other matter related to the implementation of the NAAEC to the JPAC Liaison Officer located at the CEC Secretariat.

<http://www.cec.org/jpac>

Visit <<http://www.cec.org>> to find out more about the CEC.

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