



IMPERIAL COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICE PRESS RELEASE

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Matt Dessert Retiring, Belen Leon-Lopez Appointed Interim Imperial County Air Pollution Control Officer

EL CENTRO, CA – Matt Dessert, Imperial County Air Pollution Control Officer (APCO), has announced his plans to retire from the County of Imperial by August 4, 2022. As the APCO since January 2017, Mr. Dessert, with the support of his staff, is responsible for regulating stationary sources of air pollution within Imperial County through permits and local rules to protect the health and quality of life of its residents. After receiving notification, the Imperial County Board of Supervisors appointed Belen Leon-Lopez to serve as Interim APCO, managing the Imperial County Air Pollution Control District (APCD), effective August 5, 2022.

As the APCO, Dessert piloted the first-of-its-kind AB 617 Community Air Protection Program (CAPP) to improve air quality in the Calexico-Heber-El Centro community corridor, increased regulatory and community air monitoring systems, and strengthened relations with local and state bodies to improve the conditions at the Salton Sea. In addition, Dessert brought in millions of dollars in Clean Air Act grant funding and improved binational relations with the city of Mexicali for better outreach, education, and policy development.

“Mr. Dessert has done a great job during his tenure with the county,” stated Chairman of the Board of Supervisors Jesus Eduardo Escobar. “He has increased public engagement with the operations of the department. With the AB 617 program, he extended opportunities for public participation in the department’s efforts to reduce exposure in communities most impacted by air pollution. He will be missed, but the Board is confident in Ms. Leon-Lopez’s ability to lead the department during this transitional period.”

“I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked with so many hardworking and dedicated people at the Air District and County for nearly two decades,” said Dessert, “Thank you to all who were part of my career.”

Leon-Lopez has been with the APCD for nearly 15 years, beginning as an APCD Specialist and working her way into her current position as Assistant APCO. She has experience in working nearly all facets and programs of the APCD including the U.S.-Mexico Border Environmental Program: Border 2025, AB 617 CAPP, FARMER Program to help our local agriculture industry reduce emissions, Targeted Air Shed Grants Program to reduce air pollution in highly polluted areas, and Lawn Equipment Exchange Program.

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About her new position, Leon-Lopez stated, “I am humbled and honored to have been selected as the Interim APCO. I learned from great leaders, Brad Poiriez, Reyes Romero, and Matt Dessert who guided me to be successful. It is with great honor that I will continue their advocacy, to listen and work with our community and protect our residents from the harmful effects of air pollution. I am also very grateful to work with such talented APCD Management and staff.”

Leon-Lopez is a lifelong Imperial Valley resident and Central Union High School graduate. She lives in Heber with her husband and two children. She obtained her Master of Science Degree in Environmental Policy through Kaplan University and Bachelor of Business Administration through DeVry University.

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