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New Air Pollution Reduction Program For Mexico City

by Steven Ranieri

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On Oct. 15 in Mexico City, President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, Mexico City mayor Manuel Camacho Solis, Mexico state governor Ignacio Pichardo Pagaza, Urban Development and Ecology Secretary Patricio Chirinos, and PEMEX general manager Francisco Rojas Gutierrez inaugurated the Integral Program Against Atmospheric Pollution. The program is expected to prevent air pollution from doubling by the year 2000. Mexico City is submerged under a reddish cloud for most of the year. Periodically, the smog content surpasses international environmental maximum standards for carbon monoxide, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides, ozone, and lead. Acid rain comprised of sulphuric and nitric acids and other air pollutants are intensified during cold weather. In winter a mass of cold air forms over the pollution and impedes its dispersion, affecting the health of all residents, but especially persons suffering from respiratory and cardiac ailments. Last year, schools in Mexico City were closed throughout the month of January. Previous pollution reduction efforts cost \$2.5 billion, financed in large part by Japan's Eximbank. According to the Treasury and Public Credit Secretariat (SHCP), the government is expecting another \$500 million from Japan. The new plan is comprised of the following measures: replacing regular gasoline with unleaded fuel; development of mass transit (bus and subway); intensive reforestation surrounding the capital city (100 million trees in four years); catalytic converters on new vehicles; and a 20% reduction in automobile use on weekdays, via a rotation system organized by license-plate number. Industries consuming large quantities of water or fossil fuels will no longer be permitted to locate in the Valle de Mexico, and the expansion of existing plants of these types is prohibited. Production facilities found to be highly dangerous will be required to close down and relocate. PEMEX official Rojas Gutierrez said the oil company would invest \$2.1 billion in modernizing its refineries in order to produce higher quality diesel fuel and gasoline. On Oct. 25, capital city mayor Camacho Solis announced staggered shifts for government officials, students, merchants, employees and amusement facilities beginning in December. (Sources: El Financiero, El Nacional, The Mexico City News, 10/16/90, 10/25/90; Excelsior, 10/16/90; Agence France Presse, 10/18/90, 10/25/90; La Jornada, 10/25/90; Notimex, 10/27/90)

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