8-18-1993

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U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (epa) Comments On Nafta Environmental Side Accord

by Carlos Navarro
Category/Department: General
Published: Wednesday, August 18, 1993

[Below is the text of an Aug. 13 press release issued by Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) administrator Carol M. Browner stating the agency's position on the NAFTA environmental parallel accord.] The environmental side agreement that has just been hammered out begins a new era in environmental protection for all the people of the US, Mexico, and Canada. The three nations have agreed to cooperate as never before to protect the air, water, and soil throughout the North American continent. That's good news for public health throughout the continent. It's a model for the rest of the world. Common sense tells us that toxic pollution doesn't respect national boundaries. Dirty air spewed out of a smokestack in one country soon finds its way across the border. And it doesn't take long for toxic waste discharged into a river on the south bank to imperil health on the north bank as well. The new agreement binds all three nations to get smart about environmental protection. It mandates pollution prevention not just cleanup. It requires sustainable development that is, using natural resources prudently, instead of needlessly depleting them. And it promotes region-wide environmental planning on an unprecedented scale. The new agreement has teeth. It makes it harder to pollute in all three countries. It pushes all three countries to meet the highest environmental standards not the lowest. It reduces the incentive for a company to cross the border in an attempt to escape environmental regulations. And it cracks down on polluters. Systematic failure to enforce environmental laws may lead to sanctions. The agreement also guarantees more public access to courts and other administrative bodies that enforce environmental law throughout the continent. NAFTA will increase US exports and create 200,000 export-related jobs by 1995. But this welcome economic growth need not come at the expense of our environment. In fact, especially with the new environmental agreement, the treaty promises to help, not hurt. By any measure, NAFTA is the "greenest" trade agreement ever negotiated. The new side agreement makes the treaty an even stronger tool for protecting our environment. It deserves support from all who care about passing on a better world to our children and our children's children.

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