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Environmental Groups Oppose Toxic Waste Projects

by LADB Staff

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In late January, a group of 18 Mexican environmental organizations, led by Greenpeace Mexico, convoked a press conference to urge the Environmental Attorney General (Procuraduria Federal del Medio Ambiente, PFMA) and the National Environmental Institute (Instituto Nacional de la Ecologia, INE) to oppose several projects for processing or storing dangerous toxic wastes in Mexico.

The proposed projects all involve participation by US-based companies. Among the organizations represented at the press conference were Pro San Luis Ecologico, the Veracruz Environmental Information Network (Red de Informacion Ambiental de Veracruz), and the Action Network on Pesticides and Alternatives in Mexico (Red de Accion sobre Plaguicidas y Alternativas en Mexico). Rafael Gonzalez, a spokesman for Greenpeace Mexico, expressed concern that the federal government would approve the projects without adequately considering all consequences and releasing all relevant information to the public. He told reporters that environmental groups are particularly concerned about a proposal by Cementos Apasco and US-based Chemical Waste Management to test the feasibility of using chemical waste to power ovens at a plant in Ramos Arizpe, Coahuila state.

Gonzalez told reporters Chemical Waste Management "has a proven record" of violating environmental regulations in Mexico. Among other cases cited by Gonzalez were: * A plan by US-based Metalclad Corp. and Mexican partners Coterin and Eco Administracion to open a facility in Guadalucazar, San Luis Potosi state, designed specifically for storage of toxic wastes. A proposal by Metalclad to build a toxic waste treatment plant in Veracruz state was also opposed.

A decision by the city of Queretaro to hire US companies Environmental Fluid Sealing Inc. and Foster Wheeling Corp. to study the feasibility of generating electricity by burning municipal solid waste.

Gonzalez told reporters this method of energy production has been rejected in both the US and Europe as too damaging to the environment. "We find it unacceptable for Mexican authorities to allow incinerators as a safe environmental option," said Fernando Bejarano, coordinator of the Greenpeace Mexico toxics campaign, who pointed out that the US has imposed a moratorium on construction of new waste incinerators.

In a separate forum held in Monterrey in late January, another Greenpeace Mexico spokesman, Juan de Dios Sanchez, told reporters that the Mexican government has applied for a US\$1 billion loan from the World Bank to construct huge trash incinerators in Mexico's largest cities.

According to Sanchez, the plan will be vigorously opposed by a number of environmental groups and environmentally-oriented political parties in Mexico. According to Sanchez, the loan request, which the World Bank is currently considering, would carry the condition that Mexico purchase

incinerator equipment no longer being used in Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Canada, all of which have banned the burning of municipal waste. Sanchez, a physician, warned that municipal trash incinerators release harmful substances such as lead, chlorine, arsenic, and mercury into the atmosphere. In addition, he warned that for every three metric tons of trash that is burned, the incinerators produce one metric ton of fine ash, which could contribute to serious respiratory problems for nearby residents.

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