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U.S. Maquiladora Plants Kept Poor Records on Waste Disposal in 1995

by LADB Staff

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According to a study released by the national environmental institute (Instituto Nacional de Ecologia, INE), roughly two out of every three maquiladora plants along the US-Mexico border did not keep accurate records last year on where industrial wastes were dumped. The INE study, which was published in April, said the amount of unaccounted wastes totals about 16,000 metric tons per year, placing at risk the health of residents of Baja California, Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, and Sonora states, where the majority of the maquiladora plants are located. The INE suggested that many maquiladora plants disposed of these materials illegally, despite regulations drafted by the US and Mexico in 1992 requiring that hazardous materials be repatriated to the US.

The INE said the Mexican and US governments have even attempted to assist the maquiladora plants by providing training for workers on the handling of hazardous materials and creating new systems to exchange information on cross-border movement of industrial residues. According to the study, despite these safeguards, only 35% of the 1,408 maquiladora plants operating along the US-Mexico border were able to produce records last year showing that they had complied with the Mexican environmental regulations.

Roughly 30% of the plants in compliance with Mexican environmental laws produced records showing they transported 32,700 MT of industrial waste to the US. Another 5% of the maquiladora plants disposed of their waste about 11,000 MT at approved sites in Mexico. The INE said the remaining 65% of the plants were not able to provide specific information as to where waste was dumped, raising the likelihood that the hazardous materials were disposed of illegally. (Source: Excelsior, 04/04/96)

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