

10-30-1996

Environmental Authorities Worried About Surge in Air Pollution in Guadalajara

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Environmental Authorities Worried About Surge in Air Pollution in Guadalajara." (1996).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/3652>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Environmental Authorities Worried About Surge in Air Pollution in Guadalajara

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 1996-10-30

According to the national environmental institute (Instituto Nacional de Ecologia, INE), the city of Guadalajara is beginning to experience problems with air pollution similar to, or in some instances worse than, the problems in Mexico City. In a series of reports released in mid-October, the INE said the main pollution-monitoring index (Indice Metropolitano de Calidad del Aire, IMECA) in Guadalajara rated air-contaminant levels in the city above 250, or more than twice the levels considered safe. Any contaminant level above 100 on the IMECA scale is considered bad for human beings, giving rise to respiratory and lung-related complications, and above 300 points is considered extremely dangerous. Attention on air-pollution problems has focused principally on Mexico City, which is considered one of the most polluted urban centers in the world. In recent years, some attention has also been placed on air contamination in the northern industrial hub of Monterrey (see SourceMex, 04/07/93).

However, until now, the growing problems of air quality in Guadalajara had remained in the background. The situation has forced authorities to consider drastic measures to curb the problem. "The situation of air quality in the urban area of Guadalajara is beginning to show an unfavorable tendency, above all in the cold months," said Jorge Sierra, an official with the Guadalajara environmental office. Indeed, according to the INE, the air-contamination level in Guadalajara during the three-day period of Oct. 15-17 reached 284 points on the IMECA scale, even surpassing the prevailing rate for Mexico City during that same period. Furthermore, air-pollution levels remained high in Guadalajara at the end of the three-day period, while diminishing in Mexico City on that date.

Environmental officials said this trend was worrisome because meteorological conditions in the two cities were similar on that date. Environmental officials place some of the blame for increasing air pollution in Guadalajara on a surge in the number of factories near the city. "Pollution here has grown apace with industrial growth and development," INE spokesman Jose Zaragoza Avila told the Reuter news agency. Still, environmentalists place greater blame on a lack of defined policy to control automobile emissions. "In Guadalajara, as in Mexico City, most of the pollution emissions come from vehicles, and something must be done about it," said Greenpeace energy coordinator Alejandro Calvillo. According to the INE, the fact that pollution levels in Guadalajara are similar to those in Mexico City is worrisome, since the problems in Guadalajara are caused by a proportionally smaller number of vehicles.

INE statistics show that the Guadalajara metropolitan area has a population of 3.85 million and slightly more than 625,000 motor vehicles. In contrast, Mexico City has a population of more than 15 million and 2.7 million vehicles. State and federal environmental officials are considering a plan similar to one in Mexico City to place strict controls on vehicle emissions. In Mexico City, drivers are required to have their vehicles checked regularly at emission-testing centers. In addition, drivers are

required to leave their cars at home at least one day per week. Mexico City also has strong programs to contain air pollutants at gas stations and to control atmospheric contaminants at small businesses. The one similarity between Mexico City and Guadalajara is that both cities currently use the Phase One alert. Under this measure, during the time of alert, authorities halt industrial activities such as paving roads with tar reduce by half the use of government vehicles, and take steps to speed up the flow of traffic. In fact, Guadalajara authorities have already implemented Phase One several times in mid-October. "There is no doubt that we will have to implement Phase One again this year," said Jalisco state environmental official Ramon Gonzalez, predicting more periods of what Mexican authorities call "environmental contingency," when smog levels soar.

On a related matter, in early October the state-run oil company PEMEX introduced a new environmentally friendly gasoline. According to PEMEX, the new fuel is expected to reduce emissions of hydrocarbons by 12% and nitrogen oxides by 4%. However, critics said the availability of the gasoline will have little impact since the fuel was produced for cars with catalytic convertors. The new gasoline can also be used by cars without catalytic convertors. "But the environmental benefit for these cars would be minor," said a PEMEX spokesperson. Humberto Bravo, a researcher at Universidad Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM), questioned whether the new gasoline would make much difference in Mexico City, at least in the short term, since 60% of the total vehicles in the city lack catalytic convertors.

According to some estimates, 1.1 million cars circulating in Mexico City were built before 1985, and are thus responsible for the lion's share of the vehicle-related pollution problems. Environmental authorities calculate that almost 70% of the air pollution in Mexico City is caused by emissions produced by automobiles. For his part, Cipres Villarreal, director of the Mexican environmental movement (Movimiento Ecologista Mexicano, MEM), acknowledged that the new gasoline has the potential of reducing such harmful components as hydrogen oxides and nitrogen by 20% in Mexico City.

Still, Villarreal pointed out that the refining process for this gasoline has failed to remove other harmful derivatives, such as benzene and a number of other carcinogens. In conjunction with the sale of the new gasoline, Villarreal said the MEM is proposing that the government take steps to reduce the price of catalytic convertors so they can be installed by more vehicle owners in the metropolitan area. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 09/30/96; Novedades, 10/03/96; The News, 10/09/96, 10/23/96; Excelsior, 10/20/96; Reuter, 10/24/96)

-- End --