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Mexico to Grade Large Industrial Firms on Compliance with Environmental Laws

by LADB Staff

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President Ernesto Zedillo's administration is planning to implement a system to grade more than 3,000 of the country's largest companies to determine if they are in compliance with Mexico's environmental laws. Antonio Azuela de la Cueva, director of Mexico's environmental prosecutor's office (Procuraduria Federal de Proteccion al Medio Ambiente, PROFEPA), said the system will help the government become aware of problems that could pose a serious threat to the general population.

Azuela de la Cueva said companies that produce chemicals, petrochemicals, paper, glass, cement, motor vehicles, electrical appliances, furniture, and other industrial products will have to submit to the test. The test will also be applied to hospitals and food manufacturers. The government's decision follows the massive negative publicity about Grupo Penoles' Met-Mex plant in Torreon, Coahuila state. In May of this year, PROFEPA ordered Penoles to reduce production at the plant by 50% because of continuing problems with lead poisoning (see SourceMex, 1999-05-26).

The criteria for grading companies will be released along with a comprehensive study on environmental conditions in various industrial sectors in Mexico. The study will look at such factors as soil, water, and noise pollution, said Azuela. But Azuela promised that the rating system will not result in a witch-hunt. "We will present the problems with the utmost seriousness without satanizing any company," said Azuela. "Our purpose is to ensure that the majority of the companies are able to receive a grade of 100 in coming years." The PROFEPA system is directed only at large industrial companies, including the state-run oil company PEMEX.

A recent study published by the Asociacion Nacional de Industrias del Medio Ambiente found that most small and medium-sized industrial businesses in Mexico are failing to comply with environmental norms spelled out under the North America Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The study said virtually all the small and microenterprises involved in industrial production lack the proper equipment to treat industrial waste and reduce emissions of harmful materials into the air (see SourceMex, 1999-07-28). [Sources: Reuters, 08/09/99, El Universal, 08/10/99]

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