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Nicaragua: Government Orders Closure Of Chemical Plant

by Deborah Tyroler

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On Jan. 9, Health Minister Ernesto Salmeron, Economy Minister Silvio de Franco and Natural Resources Minister Jaime Incer signed a decree ordering the closure of Electroquimica Pennwalt S.A. (ELPESA) chemical plant in Managua. Plant owners were given three months to shut down operations. ELPESA, which produces chlorine and caustic soda for export and the domestic market, dumps large quantities of toxic waste into Lake Managua. Since 1979, local environmental organizations have pressured the government to close the plant due to "enormous damage to the flora and fauna around Lake Managua." Over half of ELPESA's 180 employees suffer from varying degrees of mercury poisoning. The plant's toxic waste emissions have caused health problems among persons residing near the facility, and contaminated fish in Lake Managua. De Franco said that if a suitable alternative location could be found, and if new, less environmentally destructive technology were used at the plant, the company would be allowed to resume operations. (Basic data from ACAN-EFE, 01/09/92)

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