

Mexico serious over clean border environment

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All along our 2,000 mile border Mexico and the United States share the elements of a common environment as well as mutual responsibility for its protection, which goes far beyond that invisible line.

That is why Mexico and the United States have been working together to ensure that people of each country can preserve and benefit from their natural resources.

Recently, both countries combined efforts to implement the "integrated environmental border plan" that will address environmental needs along the boundary. Several public hearings in 17 border cities became the basis for a three-year plan whose main objective is to clean up the most pressing environmental problems and to strengthen infrastructure along the frontier.

Under the plan, the US will invest \$380 million, and Mexico \$460 million. This reaffirms Mexico's long-standing commitment to protect environmental quality, as well as cooperate with the US in solving common problems, especially those regarding water treatment plants,

hazardous waste, sewage and anti-pollution equipment.

In Mexico, we are aware of the magnitude of the environmental challenge. Our common border is tremendously active, with more than 240 million crossings a year, intense economic activity and a population that has doubled in the last 10 years.

Mexico has already enforced its environmental legislation and increased its budget for this purpose by 800%. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of qualified inspectors. In-bond industries along the border have been required to recertify their operating licenses; the return of hazardous waste to its source of origin for disposal has also been enforced. Furthermore, Mexico has signed and ratified nearly all international treaties for the protection of the world's environment and natural resources, including agreements with more than 2,000 industries to install anti-pollution and emission control equipment.

In 1989 Mexico established legally enforceable environmental standards comparable to those of the industrialized nations, as well as penalties for non-compliance.

The goal of the Mexican government is to involve private enterprise in environmental protection initiatives. Eventually, certain advisory and inspection tasks will be performed by the private sector under government supervision.

Furthermore, it is appropriate for the private sector to be involved in the financing and management of projects such as water treatment plants. That is already occurring in Ciudad Juárez, across from El Paso, where some major US and Mexican companies have recently announced plans for their participation in a new water treatment plant which will benefit the entire border community.

Mexico understands that further growth cannot be achieved in isolation. It can only be reached through actively participating in the mechanics of the world economy.

In this context, by negotiating the North American Free Trade Agreement, Mexico seeks a commercial treaty that will benefit our nations and will take great care of the environment and the rational use of natural resources. Mexico will not accept any project, domestic or foreign, if it does not strictly comply with environmental criteria. **M**



Industrial pollution.

Hecón Alemán/Imaginatina.

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