

AN EMERGING SECURITY CONSCIOUSNESS

Although crime has traditionally been the main force driving Mexico's safety and security market, a broader safety consciousness is beginning to emerge.

Mexicans have not traditionally enjoyed the standards of safety and security that Canadians are accustomed to, either at work or in their personal lives. It is difficult to demonstrate the differences precisely because Mexico's official statistics do not reflect the full extent of the hazards people face. But there is little debate that those hazards are severe and that they have become more threatening over the past few years. In particular, criminals have become more violent and more daring. Public resources for crime and fire fighting have been strained by the recent economic crisis. This has forced individuals and corporations to take action to protect themselves. At the same time, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has put pressure on the Mexican government to improve its occupational health and safety record. These trends are creating a new interest in methods of improving safety and security.

Personal security has long been a serious concern in Mexico, especially for the relatively affluent. Income disparities are much greater than they are in Canada, which tends to make wealth more conspicuous. This problem has been greatly magnified by the economic crisis that swept Mexico following the devaluation of the peso in December 1994. Rates of theft and robbery soared as more than a million people were thrown out of work. For example, in the Federal District, the number of automobile thefts involving violence rose from 35 per day in 1994 to 59 per day in 1995. Over the same one-year period, violent robberies of homes rose by 36 percent. These are official police statistics, which probably understate the problem. Many crimes go unreported because of a general lack of confidence in the police and the justice system.

Mexico's occupational health and safety standards are not as comprehensive as Canada's and they are not as well enforced. Mexican labour unions tend to concentrate on economic benefits: they have not been as aggressive as their Canadian counterparts in pressing for health and safety improvements. In fact, health and safety clauses in collective agreements are most often proposed by management. The main impetus for improved standards is coming from government. This is partly a result of NAFTA, which included a "side agreement" on labour, the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC), calling upon all three governments to guarantee safer and cleaner working environments. Rising premiums for workers' compensation are another force motivating safer work practices.