

## SOLID AND HAZARDOUS WASTE DISPOSAL

*Only 4 percent of Mexico's solid waste is disposed of properly. There is only one public hazardous waste disposal facility, and virtually all clinical waste goes straight into municipal landfills.*

Although solid waste disposal is a serious problem, it has so far received less attention than air and water pollution. Only about 4 percent of Mexico's needs for solid and hazardous waste have been met.

There are three main categories of solid waste: municipal waste, industrial waste, and hazardous and clinical waste. Total solid waste amounts to more than 525,000 tonnes per day, of which more than 88 percent is of industrial origin. About 3 percent of solid waste is considered hazardous.

The mining and foundry industries alone produce more than 337,000 tonnes per day of waste material. The oil, chemical and agricultural industries are also major contributors to the solid waste problem.

Municipal garbage has been increasing due to population growth and changes in consumption patterns, and has now reached more than 60,000 tonnes per day. There were only 97 municipal landfill sites in Mexico in 1993, and only 11 of those met regulatory standards. About three-quarters of the population has no access to landfill facilities.

There is an informal, but extensive system for the recycling of glass, cardboard and plastics by *pepenadores*, people who collect and sell this material to recycling factories. About US \$2 million worth of material is recycled in Mexico City every day. This is considered an obstacle to the privatization of municipal waste collection.

## HAZARDOUS WASTE

Mexico's hazardous waste handling capacity covers only about 14 percent of the country's needs. The private sector and *paraestatales*, state-owned companies — especially *Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX)*, the national oil company — account for most of the market.

While there are a few privately operated hazardous waste disposal sites, Mexico currently has only one functioning hazardous waste dump which is open to the public. This facility is located at Mina, Nuevo León and is operated by *Residuos Industriales Multiquim (RIMSA)*. A second site in the state of San Luis Potosí has been authorized to be built by *Química Omega de México* and U.S.-based Metalclad, but it has run into problems with the state government. There are presently no standards for the disposal of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), although a new standard is scheduled to be published in 1996 by the *Instituto Nacional de Ecología (INECO)*, National Institute of Ecology.