



Youth Activists Release Comic Book Chronicling Health Risks from Tijuana Truck Traffic

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Stories

Toxic emissions from maquiladora trucks endanger public health

Tijuana, BC

— Members of Environmental Health Coalition's Tijuana-based youth group released the first in a series of self-published comic books documenting the struggle for environmental justice in Mexico's border communities.

EHC's Colectivo Chilpancingo Youth Group created the comic book "We Want Clean Air" to support the campaign to reroute diesel trucks from Tijuana neighborhoods. The

neighborhood of Chilpancingo is adjacent to the largest of the 63 industrial parks in Tijuana, less than a mile from the Otay Mesa crossing at the U.S./Mexico border. School children in Colonia Chilpancingo are exposed in the classroom and on the playground to high levels of diesel emissions from trucks serving the maquiladora industry.

Diesel exhaust is linked to serious health hazards including cancer, asthma and heart problems. Rerouting these trucks will reduce emissions and improve the health of more than 2,000 school children, their families, school staff, and those who live and work in the Colonia.

The youth creators of "We Want Clean Air" presented the book to an audience of parents, students and special guests at the Emiliano Zapata library in Tijuana's Colonia Chilpancingo.

"Making the comic book was a learning experience for me. I hope many people get to read it and find out about what is happening. I hope they support us in changing the truck routes," said 10 year old Itzia López, a member of the Youth Group.

More than 1.4 million tractor-trailer trucks cross the border every year at Otay Mesa, representing two-thirds of all traffic of commercial trucks along the border between Mexico and California. Many trucks that service the maquiladora manufacturing industry take shortcuts through the small Tijuana neighborhood.

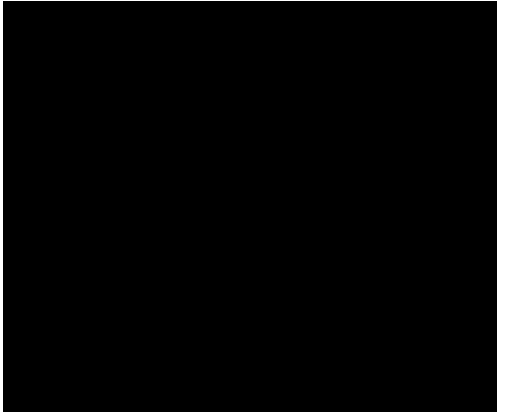
"We demand that they move these trucks away from our schools. Children have the right to learn in a healthy environment," said Ana Langarica, a Colectivo Chilpancingo member and parent of a Kindergarten student.



Itzia López of the Colectivo Chilpancingo Youth Group interviewed on the comic book "We Want Clean Air."



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In 2008 and 2009, EHC staff members and 27 residents conducted air quality tests in front of the Ana María Berlanga Kindergarten, the Nicolás Bravo/Emiliano Zapata Elementary School, and State Middle School 89 in the neighborhoods of Chilpancingo and Murúa. An analysis of the results showed alarming levels of microparticulates at the three sites. The highest level was 370,666 particulates per cubic centimeter in front of the Kindergarten. By comparison, the average level at the control site, located a few blocks from the school, was 14,750 particulates per cubic centimeter.

"We are not against jobs. We want people to have work, but we want it to be done in an organized way and without putting the health of our children at risk," said Myrna Flores, a Colectivo Chilpancingo member and community resident.

More than 1,000 supporters have signed a petition demanding an end to the invasion of maquiladora trucks in the neighborhood. Supporters include teachers, parents and students, medical professionals from the local community clinic, students from the Universidad Iberoamericana and the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, staff from El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, and members of the religious, environmentalist, and human rights communities in different areas of México, the United States, Chile, Argentina and Brazil.

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