

## After More Than a Decade of Struggle, Community Celebrates Tijuana Toxic Site Cleanup

**E**nvironmental Health Coalition and its Tijuana affiliate, the Colectivo Chilpancingo Pro Justicia Ambiental (Colectivo), are celebrating the culmination of over ten years of struggle. “The cleanup of the abandoned Tijuana lead smelter known as Metales y Derivados, completed in 2008, represents a binational environmental justice and public health victory,” said Magdalena Cerda, EHC Organizer. “The cleanup of Metales y Derivados is a huge victory for us. We hope it can inspire and guide other communities seeking solutions to environmental injustices like this one.”

Shut down by the Mexican government in 1994 for repeated violations of environmental law, Metales y Derivados continued to pollute nearby communities. Neither EHC nor the community gave up, and our persistence won out.

### History of Metales y Derivados

#### 1972-1994

For over 20 years, the U.S.-based New Frontier Trading Corporation, owned by José Kahn, recycled batteries in Tijuana. In 1986, operations moved from the La Gloria neighborhood to the Metales y Derivados site on the Mesa de Otay, above the community of Colonia Chilpancingo.



#### 1994

The Mexican government permanently shut down Metales y Derivados. José Kahn fled across the border to San Diego after a warrant was issued for his arrest for alleged environmental crimes. He left behind 7,000 metric tons of lead slag, along with other hazardous waste. No cleanup was proposed by the owner, or mandated by the U.S. or Mexican government.

#### 1998

Residents of Colonia Chilpancingo and EHC filed a citizen’s petition with the

North American Free Trade Agreement’s Commission for Environmental Cooperation (CEC) to address the urgent need for cleanup of the toxic site.



#### 2000

At a press conference in Tijuana, EHC and Colonia Chilpancingo residents called for immediate cleanup, while simultaneously, in Dallas, Texas, a representative of the community delivered 500 letters signed by Colonia Chilpancingo residents to the head of Mexico’s environmental agency at a meeting of the CEC.

#### 2001

EHC and Colonia Chilpancingo activists, along with Mexican and U.S. supporters and allied groups, demonstrated in front of New Frontier Trading Company’s offices in San Diego.



#### 2002

The CEC responded to EHC’s petition by publishing a factual record on the Metales y Derivados case corroborating community concerns that toxic substances

at the site represent a “grave risk to human health.” Still, there was no plan or money for cleanup. The CEC lacks the authority to require cleanup.

*“Metales y Derivados is the poster child for the failure of NAFTA to protect public health and the environment. NAFTA’s environmental commission can’t compel a toxic site cleanup. All it can do is document the danger.”*  
– Amelia Simpson, Director BEJC

## 2002

EHC and Colonia residents formally inaugurated a Community Action Team, the Colectivo. EHC, the Colectivo, and supporters from Mexico and the U.S. held a 24-hour vigil in front of the office of Mexico's environmental enforcement agency in Tijuana demanding an immediate cleanup.



## 2003

A government working group to address cleanup was formed. The Colectivo demanded participation in the working group and presented its own cleanup plan, requesting immediate implementation.

## June 24, 2004

Members of the Colectivo signed an agreement with the Mexican government for a comprehensive cleanup within 5

years, starting the first of four steps right away.



## 2005-2007

The working group, consisting of Colectivo members, EHC, and Mexican and U.S. government officials, held regular meetings at EHC's Colectivo office in Colonia Chilpancingo to oversee the cleanup. The first phase of cleanup, completed in September 2005, removed 1,900 tons of toxic waste.

## October 2007

Final cleanup at Metales y Derivados began, with independent community monitoring.



*"To transform a notorious toxic site into a symbol of how communities can lift their voices and achieve justice, that's historic!"*

*– Lourdes Luján, a member of the Colectivo and longtime resident of Colonia Chilpancingo.*

## October, 2008

Toxic cleanup is completed.

Colectivo continues efforts with Working Group to determine appropriate reuse of the site and ensure longterm monitoring.

*Colectivo members Yesenia Palomares Rodríguez and Lourdes Luján document the cleanup.*

*EHC and the Colectivo thank the following people and organizations, whose support and efforts made this victory possible, as well as the thousands more who signed petitions and postcards supporting our efforts:*

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*For more information, contact Environmental Health Coalition at 619-474-0220,  
401 Mile of Cars Way, Ste. 310, National City, CA 91950*