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New Study Shows El Paso Smelter Responsible for Toxic Pollution in Texas, New Mexico and Mexico

Results Come One Week Before Texas Decides on ASARCO Permit Renewal

El Paso (Tex.), Anapra (N.M.) and Ciudad Juárez (Chihuahua) – New soil samples taken in El Paso, Tex.; Anapra, N.M.; and Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua (Mexico) show dangerous levels of pollution, including lead and arsenic. The tests, conducted by award-winning chemist Michael E. Ketterer, show that the American Smelting and Refinery Company (ASARCO) metal smelter in El Paso is chiefly responsible for the toxic pollution in the area. The new evidence comes one week before the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality (TCEQ) meets in Austin to decide whether to renew ASARCO's state air emissions permit.

"ASARCO's scientific fingerprints are all over the pollution in El Paso, Anapra and Ciudad Juárez," said Ketterer. "Only the ASARCO smelter – and not gasoline or lead paint – can account for the types of lead found in the soils tested."

The results showed high levels of lead, arsenic or cadmium at most of the 98 sites tested. Elevated blood lead levels in children can cause learning disabilities, behavioral problems and nerve damage. Exposure to arsenic can cause gastrointestinal problems, nerve disorders and lung cancer.

"This new evidence proves what our binational community has long suspected: ASARCO has poisoned us all and needs to be held accountable for its actions," said Mariana Chew, Conservation Organizer for the Sierra Club's Environmental Justice program in El Paso.

The Sierra Club urges the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality to protect children's health by denying ASARCO's air permit renewal when it meets in Austin on February 8. State administrative judges have already recommended that the permit not be renewed, but the TCEQ must approve the recommendation in order to keep the facility from reopening.

"The only permit that ASARCO deserves is a permit to clean up its mess and get out of town," said Oliver Bernstein, U.S./Mexico Border Representative for the Sierra Club. "ASARCO's pollution does not recognize borders, and ASARCO clearly does not respect the people of El Paso, Anapra or Ciudad Juárez."

To read the study and for more information about how ASARCO impacted the El Paso-Anapra-Ciudad Juárez area, visit: <http://www.sierraclub.org/beyondtheborders>

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