

## Case 10

The goal of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) is to increase trade between the United States, Canada and Mexico. Since NAFTA took effect in January 1994, less restrictive standards for Mexican trucks entering the U.S. have significantly increased cross-border traffic. For example, the Environmental Protection Agency reports that truck traffic through Texas has increased 17% since the passage of NAFTA. This increasing number of trucks entering the U.S. from Mexico has sparked controversy on environmental and economic issues.

Trucks entering the United States from Mexico are not subject to the same emissions standards as U.S. trucks. Prior to 1993, Mexico had no emissions standards for trucks; when Mexico enacted standards in 1993, those standards fell well short of the standards for U.S. trucks. Trucks built prior to 1993 represent 80 to 90% of those entering the U.S. from Mexico. U.S. cities bordering Mexico such as San Diego, El Paso, Laredo, and Brownsville are facing a rise in pollution levels that is partly due to the increased truck traffic, as a vast majority of truck traffic squeezes through these entry points.

Under the Clinton Administration, trucks entering the United States from Mexico were restricted to a 3 to 20 mile radius from the point of entry in order to reduce accidents and mitigate diesel emissions. However, a NAFTA tribunal ruled that this policy is not in accordance with the agreement and that trucks entering the United States from Mexico must have full access to the country. In late November 2002, President Bush acted on the tribunal's ruling and lifted the 20-mile restriction, paving the way for Mexican trucking companies to have full access to the U.S.

Environmentalists and highway safety advocates claim that under such a plan, many of the highway safety and diesel exhaust problems restricted to border towns would be expanded to other areas of the United States. Air pollution in areas such as southern California would be exacerbated by an influx of trucks not required to meet the State of California standards. The Teamsters union also opposes allowing Mexican trucking companies having full access to the U.S., claiming that doing so would cost American jobs.

Advocates for full access suspect that the real reason of the opposition is not based on health and safety concerns, but rather on an effort by United States labor unions to retain economic hegemony over Mexico. In fact, these advocates claim, many of the standards for trucks entering from Mexico exceed United States standards for U.S. trucks and trucks entering from Canada. NAFTA expert Sidney Weintraub remarked in the summer of 2001, "I wouldn't call it racism, but I'd call it a kind of economic imperialism."

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