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READERS' OPINION

Cleaning up the act

In our article "Cemex receives EPA Permit to burn tires," published Thursday, Aug. 24, 2006, Frances Ryan incorrectly states a permit allowing cement company Cemex to burn tires will increase emission levels at its Ponce plant.

Let's be clear about the facts. Under this permit, emissions of soot (particulate matter) will be reduced, while emissions of nitrogen oxide, carbon monoxide, volatile organic compounds and sulfur dioxide will not increase. More importantly, these changes will not degrade the air quality in the area. In truth, by installing state-of-the-art pollution controls, pollution from the cement plant will actually be reduced from current levels.

From an environmental standpoint, this proposal is a positive one, and one that has successfully been employed at about 40 cement plants on the mainland. Using tires as fuel has an important benefit: it is better to recover the energy from a tire than to landfill it. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency supports the best practical use of scrap tires in accordance with the waste management hierarchy, in order of preference: reduce, reuse, recycle, waste-to-energy, and disposal in an appropriate facility.

The public should remain confident EPA will remain actively engaged with all stakeholders to ensure that the environment in Borinquen is vigorously protected.

Alan J. Steinberg

Regional Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency

Let the numbers count

In recent days, we learned about the long awaited implementation of a system aimed at gathering data on our children's education—a system that is necessary not only to get information about the quality of education on the island, but also to document the effectiveness of educational programs. The results of outstanding efforts—such as those of educators who, during the recent government shutdown, continued teaching their students—deserve

to be acknowledged, measured and documented.

For years, it has been shown that a significant share of statistics produced or compiled by Puerto Rico government agencies are incomplete or unreliable. We know these figures do not tell the *real* story of our people. Crises in Puerto Rico are a consequence, to a great extent, of the absence of valid and trustworthy information and of the inefficiency of the data collection methods used to gather and maintain data on education, the economy and social well being.

Our government and corporate leaders do not have complete, updated and reliable figures, an essential element in the process of making sound decisions. Our nonprofit organizations waste a lot of their scarce resources trying to get statistics that demonstrate the needs of their communities and justify their programs.

The absence of reliable statistics in Puerto Rico places the whole population at risk. How do the country's leaders identify people's needs and determine the appropriate investment of our resources if they do not have solid data over the long term to establish priorities? How do we measure progress and achievements without this information?

Beyond the concrete threat of losing federal funding for education programs, it is unacceptable for Puerto Rico to be unable to report with certainty on our teachers' credentials, for instance, or to verify the island's school dropout rate.

The State's capacity to gather and analyze information efficiently is vital to improving the level of well being of all Puerto Ricans. Initiatives to establish information systems and statistical centers that would make this information accessible to everyone should be recognized and supported by the public, private and nonprofit sectors because they help to identify needs, guide the correct investment of resources and evaluate results.

Sonia M. Pérez

VP Research & Strategic Initiatives
National Council of La Raza