

How one line on a map explains 9% of the U.S.-Mexico hazardous waste trade

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Let's talk about

CleanHarbors
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

a company that appears in 1/3 of the rows in the “waste importer” dataset. Its ubiquity isn't so surprising: they had **\$1 billion** in waste disposal revenues last year, and according to them most of the hazardous waste incinerated in North America goes through one of their facilities.

Most of the waste they import is leftovers from the manufacture of **vinyl chloride**, the stuff you need to make PVC pipes.

Further digging revealed that Clean Harbors imports a lot of this vinyl chloride waste: 11,089 tons from 2007-2012, which adds up to **9% of all hazardous waste imported into the U.S.** that's measured in pounds or kilograms. Where does it all come from?

Clean Harbors Deer Park
La Porte, Texas

U.S.

MEXICO

Pajaritos Petrochemical Complex
Coatzacoalcos, Veracruz, Mexico

All the vinyl chloride waste imported by Clean Harbors comes from a single location in Mexico. And it all ends up at one Clean Harbors plant.

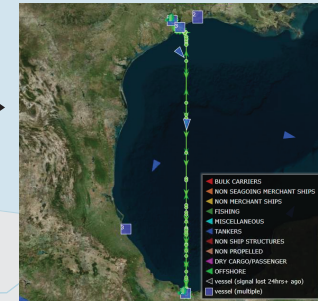
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That one plant is the Deer Park facility in La Porte, Texas. But why's the waste coming to Texas? What's the economic sense of moving waste **800 miles** just to burn it?

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The map holds the answer: **both the Deer Park facility and the Pajaritos complex are adjacent to ports on the Gulf of Mexico, and it's a straight shot between them.**

We don't have manifests but public shipping data from IHS maritime confirms ▶ that chemical tankers make regular runs between the two ports, taking on cargo in Mexico and unloading it in Texas.



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It's a simple route, and also a cheap one: moving cargo by ship is far less costly than moving it by rail or road. Add a free trade agreement that smooths international waste transit and the picture becomes clear: **low transport costs plus NAFTA equals a booming trade in hazardous waste between Mexico and the U.S.**