

TIRED TIRES IN MEXICO

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TO GET THIS ARTICLE UP AND ROLLING LET'S CONSIDER SOME INTERESTING NUMBERS. LAST YEAR IT IS ESTIMATED THAT 1.72 BILLION TIRES WERE SOLD AND SHIPPED WORLDWIDE.

In 2014, the United States imported a record number of 60.5 million passenger and light truck tires from China alone. Canadians buy around 26 million tires each year, with a corresponding number becoming used tires.

Any way you look at it, that's a lot of rubber, steel and fiber to deal with once a tire has reached the end of its made for lifespan. Currently on an annual basis, it is estimated that more than 3 billion used tires are stockpiled worldwide each and every year. Europeans jointly tossed out more than 250 million tires in 2002.

From the – we did it to ourselves – files come some interesting tire factoids. Tires are non-biodegradable because we made them that way so that they could handle extreme weather conditions. Tires are extremely flammable due to the chemicals that we used in the manufacturing process. And, as any farmer can attest to, old discarded tires left lying around on the ground hold water and are perfect breeding grounds for mosquitoes.

So now that we have created this situation what can we do about our scrap tyre predicament? The answer may be in the four Rs (4Rs) Reduce – Reuse – Recycle – Recover as detailed in CANMET-MTL 2005 Scrap Tire Recycling in Canada report. Existing and new technologies will be essential for the recover/re-capture portion of the 4Rs.

An industry leader in scrap tire collection and recycling programs since 1997, the New Brunswick-based Tire Recycling Atlantic Canada Corporation, has recovered/re-captured more than 300 million pounds of rubber from scrap tires for recycling into new high quality products. Products like; Safe-Play playground sur-



FIGURE 1

faces, Supershred Mulch, and anti-fatigue mats.

In 2014 the United States generated a whopping 313 million scrap tires. Heading further south we find out that nearly 1/4 of all the tires sold in Mexico were actually used tires from the U.S. Also, on an annual basis, about a million tires cross over through the Tijuana area. The rationale is that Mexicans drive cheap old cars and



FIGURE 3



FIGURE 2

old cars use old tires. And anyone who has travelled in Mexico has surely noticed that there are lots and lots of tires that are smooth as a baby's butt or as Mexicans call them Llantas Lisas.

Some less than scrupulous American tire shop owners have taken advantage of this situation by giving or selling – very cheaply to Mexicans who are crossing the border – old tires that they are unable to sell or use in the U.S. This is seen as a smart business decision because it would cost the shop owners more money to pay to scrap or recycle the tires in the States.

A 2009 study conducted by San Diego State University for California's Integrated Waste Management Board reported that the used-tire trade between California and Baja California is a roughly 180 million dollar industry. Most of the nearly 10,000 jobs resulting from this industry are in Mexican tire shops.

Throughout Mexico there are many different types of highways, bi-ways, roads, streets and pathways. Road surfaces that widely vary; from the super smooth and flat toll roads, to broken & pot holed pavement, right down to dirt tracks that are better suited to a mule than a vehicle. Most roads have Topes or speedbumps, which greatly add to vehicle and tire wear and tear.

The one thing that is clearly noticeable is the enormous number of businesses called Vulcanizadoras – loosely sort-of translates into tire sellers and repairers – that have been created. Most highways, roads, cities and towns are sure to have one, two or more of these businesses. They are operated out of vehicles, huts, storefronts or something larger. (See Fig 1)

In Puebla, a city of over 3 million

Mexicans, one of the many Vulcanizadoras owners is an enterprising young man named Christian Aguayo. In his mid-thirties he has been working on tires in his own tiny shop for over 6 years. Normally working seven days a week, he usually puts in ten hour days and he thinks that he has 30 or so customers a week.

Christian says that he has no idea how much money he makes and that he gets by on what he makes or as he says

Para Pasarla! Occasionally he will sell a few new tires, but he mostly sells used or repaired and patched tires. The patches that are put on tires are called Gallitos. As he puts it, "My business relies on me being able to put a patch on just about anything." (See Fig 2)

Christian sells a set of 4 brand new tires from around \$4,400 to \$7,500 MXN or even higher. This converts to \$330 & \$560 CAD. He might sell a set of good quality

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FIGURE 4

used tires for \$2,200 or \$165 CAD. Llantas Lisas run from about 5 to 10 dollars CAD. Generally, unlike Canadians, a lot of Mexicans won't buy sets of tires, but rather will – under extreme duress – purchase only a single new tire. Most drivers, due to the cost factor, usually drive on repaired or patched tires.

His newer tires come from tire suppliers and he can and will take individual orders. To save his customers money he usually buys seconds or slightly defective tires. He gives his clients a discount if they leave their used tires with him and he then repairs or patches them for resale. Tires that he can't move are eventually sold to dealers and end up being ground up into a form of mulch.

Many Mexicans are hardworking, en-

terprising and show an amazing ability to adapt on the fly to ever changing situations. Life in Mexico may be sometimes challenging but their superb small business mentality allows them to do or sell almost anything & everything, anywhere at any time. For example; Senora Elia who runs Tortas Don Eli in a small town named Apizaco, has used tires for sale outside her taco stand and when asked why she responded, "Because I have them!" (See Fig 3)

Over the past few years Mexico has been experiencing a renaissance of rebirth as federal, state and local governments work on reclaiming their country from the mountains of waste and refuse that has been dumped throughout the country. In many cases local residents have taken it upon themselves to work at beautifying their own environments.

In Puebla, Mexico in May of 2012 Linear Park was opened as part of the city led Atoyac River reclamation project. An army of volunteers and city workers carted away roughly 9,000 cubic feet of dumped garbage, planted nearly 5,000 trees and 300,000 plants, and brought in 8,000 tons of compost. There are 13 kilometers of award winning parks, including the Eco-Parque Metropolitano.

This ongoing project is marketed as a model of how to create environmental awareness and promote environmental education. Some highlights of the parks are a frog constructed entirely from car

tires, a watch made from recycled material and a 5.2-kilometer jogging path composed of llancreto (recycled tires and concrete). The park is presently in the midst of laying down a new and improved jogging path (see Fig 4).

Scattered throughout the country one will occasionally stumble across individual efforts at brightening the landscape while doing their own personal bit for recycling (see Fig 5). Old tires can also be utilized as traffic sign holders (see Fig 6), advertising boards, playground material, fencing and display stands for bowls and jugs.

Tossed out and discarded tires have become such an issue in Mexico that in June of 2014 the Ministry of Transport and Communications published a decree mandating that used tires now be classified as "special management waste." Accordingly, the decree expressly prohibited the final disposal of used tires in vacant lots, gullies, ravines, drainage and sewage pipes, and bodies of water, amongst other places.

The Ministry also set a two-year period deadline for responsible parties to develop and submit Management Plans to the appropriate local authorities. The plans are to outline how the rubber from used tires would be reclaimed and recycled into federal road, bridge constructions and in maintenance activities. Interesting

enough, this is something that the average Mexican has been doing for year's right at the grass-roots level. 🚗



FIGURE 6



FIGURE 5