

## IF YOU DEMAND TRANSPARENCY, THEY MIGHT COME AFTER YOU: MEXICAN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES NEED WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

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Bernardo Salas Mar was a radiology technician at the Laguna Verde nuclear plant in the 1990s when he became Mexico's top whistleblower, denouncing, "corruption, human error, and negligence [that] adds up to inadequate security measures," at the state-run facility. He outlined problems to superiors. They demoted and ostracized him. He filed administrative and legal complaints. They fired him. He got journalistic coverage of this and related issues. They intimidated him. He persisted. But he inevitably feels vulnerable to attack.

The public has benefited from Salas' demands for accountability, while he has endured persecution. Salas provided reporters with the results of his IFAI appeal, uncovering plans administrators had denied for shipping radioactive waste. He gave media representatives documents that he obtained through freedom-of-information requests that showed corruption in proposed plant expansion and implicated suppliers in possible misuse of public funds. His criticism of unsafe practices has led organized civil society to demand improvements.

Salas now works at the prestigious National Autonomous University of Mexico in the Environmental Radiology Laboratory. He is recognized as an expert at forums from the United States to Spain and Peru. But he feels under siege in his own country because of the incriminating evidence that he has revealed. Two national professional associations recently refused to include Salas' studies in their congresses. Industry colleagues at a hemispheric conference in Mexico belittled him for divulging instances of overexposure at Laguna Verde. His former boss there threatened to sue him. Officials have twice refused to accept his license renewal application, a requirement for his job.

"Vulnerable" is the word he uses to describe his situation. "They are furious and capable of affecting my work, my family, or me personally," he says.

Salas insisted on official accountability even before Mexico’s transparency law took effect. Now he uses the law to expose sensitive details relevant to community health and welfare. As a result, he has suffered career setbacks and he faces continued insecurity, rather than being rewarded and recognized for his diligence. His case is a textbook illustration of the need to create measures that provide respect and protection to whistleblowers.