Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Rights is a quarterly newsletter on occupational and safety issues in Asia. It is prepared by the ANROEV Secretariat. The newsletter contains information and news about the campaigns of the network in Asia – Mining, Victim’s Organising, Lung Diseases, and Electronics.

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Opinions and suggestions to the editor are encouraged. Please send enquiries to

The Editor
Secretariat – ANROEV
c/o Environics Trust
Khasra Number 177, Neb Sarai
New Delhi – 110068
Ph – (91-11)2953-3957
Fax – (91-11)2953-1814
Email – anroev@gmail.com

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside This Issue</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ANROEV Conference 2013</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough is Enough – Stop these Murders at Workplaces in Asia</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rotterdam Convention in crisis, say civil society groups</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workers Memorial Day</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Update from Partners</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Trip to Remember</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the shiny 'agate' stones in jewelry and rosary beads are killing workers</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Govt comes to silicosis victims' aid</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special issues on asbestos open the door</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report on State of the Urban Youth India 2012: Employment, Livelihoods, Skills released</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress on asbestos in Iran</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tributes</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional News</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All readers are welcome to provide feedback and suggestions to articles of OSH Rights. In the coming issues, we will offer space for reader feedback.
For any questions about Occupational Health and Safety in Asia, send an email to anroev@gmail.com. Our panel of experts will attempt to reply to all questions.
ANROEV Conference 2013

The biennial conference for the Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims (ANROEV) was held at Bangkok from May 8-10, 2013. More than 130 participants from across the globe participated in the meeting and shred their experiences on Occupational Health and Safety. The conference marked the 20th anniversary of the devastating fire in a factory in Thailand and was held in the backdrop of devastating incidents in Bangladesh and Pakistan in which more than 1500 workers lost their lives.

The conference began with a 2 minute silence in which all workers who had lost their lives due to unsafe working conditions were remembered. Representatives of Kader and Zhili fire remembered the conditions prevalent 20 years ago and the changes these incidents had brought to the working conditions in the factories. Participants from Pakistan and Bangladesh then put forward the conditions in their countries in the aftermath of the devastating fires and building collapses. Tazreen factory victim narrated his experience and impact on health due to the fire and lack of effort by the government to improve the situation. A session on International Osh groups followed in which we had representation from South Africa, COSH networks from USA, European Work Hazards Network and the Hazards Network, UK. MSSN network presented the OSH situation in Latin America and CAW from Canada.

The participants then broke into different groups to participate in simultaneous workshops. On day 1 the workshop organized were

1. Social Media Workshop
2. Occupational Lung Diseases
3. Chemical Poisoning

Day 2 workshops

1. Electronics Workshop including environment concerns
2. Victims Organising
3. Legal Practitioners

Following the Workshops, we assembled again to discuss the future course and strategy for the network. Simon Pickvance was remembered for his immense contribution towards occupational Health and safety and the contribution towards ANROEV network. The network discussed resolutions regarding recommended changes in the ILO convention 121 and the recommendations by SAICM on the hazards on electronic sector. The network members agreed to send in their recommendations to these resolutions by May 26th for consideration.

Executive Committee – the new Executive Committee of the network was selected and the members are – Xiao Ying (China), Sugio Furuya (Japan), Hong Chan (Hong Kong), Noel Colina
We congratulate the new members of the committee and wish them all the best.

**Regional Advisory Board** – Members to the regional advisory board were selected – Voravidh Chareonloet (Thailand), Earl Brown (USA), Apo Leong (Hong Kong), Dr Barry Kistnasamy (South Africa), Dr Thomas Gassert (USA), Dr Domyung Paek (South Korea), Jagdish Patel (India), Miriam Lara-Meloy (USA), Ted Smith (USA) and Professor Yu (China).

The next conference has been proposed to be held in November / December 2014 in Taiwan with Hong Kong as an alternative venue.

A report of the proceedings of the conference is being prepared and will be shared soon. Presentations and papers of the conference will be uploaded soon on the ANROEV website. Please check the website for more updates.

A meeting on hazards in Electronics sector was held on the sidelines of the ANROEV meeting in which the participants discussed the present situation in different parts of the world and formed an elaborate strategy on how things can be improved.

A press conference was held on the next day. Please [click here](#) for the press release.

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**Enough is Enough – Stop these Murders at Workplaces in Asia**

The Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims (ANROEV) is deeply saddened and outraged at the recent industrial disasters in Pakistan and Bangladesh. Within a spate of 8 months more than 1300 workers have died and the toll is still rising as the bodies are being pulled out of the Rana Plaza. Just when this statement is being written there is one more fire in a garment factory in Bangladesh killing more than 7 people.

ANROEV being a victims’ network, spread in more than 14 Asian countries, was bonded together by two similar devastating fires in Thailand and China two decades back. Thus ANROEV fully understands the pain and agony that the victims and their families are facing and would like to express deep solidarity with the affected workers and their families. It is very unfortunate – as we are observing the 20th anniversary of the Kader fire, which stood as the worst industrial fire for about 19 years, till the recent industrial disasters in Karachi and Dhaka. They have opened the old wounds again and this time more painful. History keeps on repeating in gruesome way.
ANROEV members also express their deep outrage at the colossal loss of life, which is now unprecedented by any scale. Fire and structural safety of the buildings is the basic right that workers in Asia rightfully deserve. Providing safe fire passage is well known for more than a century since the ‘Triangle Fire’ of New York in 1911 and if it is not provided or remains blocked any deaths henceforth should amount to ‘murder’ and not just an accident.

Events of the last 8 months have clearly demonstrated a complete failure of the CSR and hollowness of the ‘self-regulatory’ standards and industry audits that manufactures and brands have been adopting in collusion with states. It has led to the weakening of the state regulatory mechanisms, which otherwise could have allowed inspections of these facilities by local authorities and thus disasters could have been prevented. It has also shown the failure of both for profit and nonprofit social auditing, that seems to be detached from the realities at ground.

Ironically, majority of the post-disaster proposals include the same failed and discredited CSR approach and corporate led top down proposals that tends to privatize what should be ‘state’ function like setting up of strong labour laws, OSH regulations including building codes and enforcing them.

At this point we also need to understand the underlying causes that include:

- The Economic model of neo-liberal development that systematically dismantles the local institutions of regulation and liberates brands and businesses both local and multinational to operate not only without accountability but with unprecedented impunity.
- Blood ‘quest’ for profits by the major clothing brands and retailers come at the cost of workers’ life and health. The price of clothes does not reflect the real cost of the production, damage to environment and health of workers and communities. These costs are borne by the workers, their families and the communities, sometimes for many generations.
- Lack of governments in the region to fulfill the responsibility to protect their citizens by failing to enforce present laws and criminally prosecuting the businesses who kill workers at workplaces.
- Anti-union practices and lack of freedom of association that have kept the workplaces virtually union free. With limited bargaining power workers find it difficult to change the condition at work.
- Levels of poverty among the workers that forces them to work in dangerous environment so that they can feed their families.

The network therefore demands:

1. Immediate fair compensation to all the victims and their families and proper long term rehabilitation for all the affected workers and their families.
2. Free and independent enquiry into root causes of the accident, which should lead to long term structural changes that includes building/strengthening of the local democratic institutions, making them accountable to the workers and people and allows for the progressive taxing of the industry that fund these institutions.
3. Criminal prosecution of all the responsible parties – including the owner, buyers for their negligence and auditors that ‘certified’ the premises as safe.

**Henceforth**

1. Companies should be obliged to comply with national and international health and safety measures, whichever is a higher standard, in a serious manner through which should be monitored locally by strengthening the local independent inspections.
2. Union and workers participation at all levels in health and safety policies and decisions has to be recognized as indispensable component in ensuring safe and healthy workplaces. Concrete steps should be taken to ensure freedom of association.
3. Active formation and recognition of victims’ organizations as legitimate representatives of the injured and dead workers.
**Rotterdam Convention in crisis, say civil society groups**

Handful of countries highjack international agreement, intended to protect human health and environment.

Civil society groups attending the Rotterdam Convention conference in Geneva are expressing grave alarm that the Convention has been hijacked by the asbestos industry, which is determined to prevent the environmental and health protections of the Convention from being implemented.

For the fourth time, a handful of countries allied to the asbestos industry have refused to allow chrysotile asbestos to be added to the Convention’s list of hazardous substances, even though the Convention’s expert scientific committee has repeatedly recommended that it be listed and even though it has been recognized that the listing of chrysotile asbestos meets all the criteria of the Convention. The committee’s conclusions are endorsed by all leading medical organisations and by the World Health Organisation.

“It is outrageous that seven countries – Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, India and Vietnam – are turning the Rotterdam Convention into a Convention that protects profits of the asbestos industry, instead of protecting human health and the environment,” said Kathleen Ruff, co-coordinator of the Rotterdam Convention Alliance.

“The Convention requires that countries practice responsible trade by obtaining prior informed consent before they export hazardous substances to another country,” said Laurie Kazan-Allen, coordinator of IBAS, UK. “But these seven countries are determined to practice irresponsible trade and to hide the hazards of chrysotile asbestos.”

Fernanda Giannasi, a labour inspector in Brazil, reports that, in her job, she daily sees products containing chrysotile asbestos entering her country without labels, and tells of the great many victims who develop cancers from asbestos exposure in her country. “Since these countries refuse to follow responsible trade information practices, it will force other countries to resort to other measures, such as a full ban on asbestos,” said Giannasi.

“Russia and Zimbabwe recently ratified the Convention and attended the Rotterdam Convention conference of the parties for the first time,” said Sugio Furuya of the Asia Ban Asbestos Network. “It seems that they ratified the Convention with the sole purpose of wrecking it in order to protect the profits of their national asbestos industry. This is shameful, cynical conduct on their part. They are ruthlessly destroying the Convention to achieve their aim.”

“If the Convention is not going to be implemented and become empty words on paper, then what is the point of having the Convention?” asked Emmanuel Odjam-Akumatey of Ecological Restorations, Ghana. “The credibility of the Convention, and all 152 countries who have ratified the Convention is at stake.”

“These seven countries, allied to the asbestos industry, are demonstrating contempt for the right of countries to prior informed consent, which is the whole purpose of the Convention,” said Alessandro Pugno of the Association of Asbestos Victims Families, Casale, Italy. “That is why we have once again brought one hundred people, representing asbestos victims organisations, in front of the UN headquarters in Geneva and presented to the president of the conference their letter, calling for chrysotile asbestos to be listed.

“As well as civil society, the vast majority of parties to the Rotterdam Convention are dismayed and supported the statement by Australia yesterday stating that the cost of inaction will be huge,” said Elina Doszhanova of Social-Eco Fund NGO from Kazakhstan. “Although we are a major exporting country of chrysotile asbestos, there is no in-depth research and understanding of the current and future health and environmental costs of inaction.”

**Read More**

**Workers Memorial Day**

ANROEV members undertook several activities across the region to commemorate the International Workers Memorial Day 2013. For details please [visit](#).
Update from Partners
Asbestos Action in Hong Kong - ARIAV

Ma Tong Village Asbestos Issue in Jan 2013

On Jan 28 2013, The main media exposed that asbestos were disposed illegally in Ma Tong Village. The photos show that asbestos were broken and expose to the air. The Environmental Protection Department started to clean the asbestos after reporting, and the media said that some parties had complained it to The Environmental Department in the past nine years, but she always ignore their concern.

Mr. Chan Kam Hong made an investigation in the site, he found that some asbestos had been cleaned; however, some were covered by canvas. Under the canvas, we could see the asbestos fragment was put in some bags, but the bags were broken. Workers seemed to collect asbestos with a white bag without any PPE, and the asbestos fragment was disposed everywhere.

The next day when asbestos was exposed in Ma Tong Village, we petitioned to the Environmental Protection Department and met with the officers. We requested the department to dismantle the asbestos in a special process. In order to enhance public’s awareness, especially the workers who need to dismantle asbestos buildings, we also requested them to make a general survey and list out all of asbestos buildings. We urged them to start the legislation process of banning all kinds of asbestos as soon as possible.

Shek Mun Hong Kong Bank Building Construction Site Issue

On Feb 4 2013, The media reported that a constructor used asbestos fireproof carpets in Hong Kong Bank Building Construction site in Shek Mum; and after used, the asbestos fireproof carpets were disposed everywhere. We felt shock that why the asbestos fireproof carpets appear in Hong Kong while constructor had never applied for the environmental Protection Department's permit.

In the afternoon, we criticized the building's owner (because we thought that the owner has responsibility to monitor the working process safety) and the contractor outside of the construction site, and promoted asbestos’ impact to the workers as well.

Some workers complained that they didn’t know the fireproof carpets include asbestos, and when the managers instructed them to clean the broken carpets, they didn’t provide any PPE. The workers worried about their health. Now we are striving to help the victims.

To download report – Click here
**Bangladesh Occupational Safety, health and Environment Foundation (OSHE)**

**Victims Support Unit** - OSHE has set up a new unit; named Victims Support Unit. This unit directly works with occupational victims in both formal and informal sectors. The unit is trying to build up an effective occupational victims network at national level. We have already made two networks - Tazreen garments victims network and Smart garments victims network. Moreover, the network formation for Rana Plaza victims is now under process. The core aim of this unit is to organize victims so that they can understand about their occupational rights and raise their voice in favor of upholding their rights. Besides, the unit monitors workplace related accidents dissecting fifteen leading daily newspapers of the country and reveals reports on monthly, quarterly and yearly basis.

**Human Chain in the Demand of Due Compensation and Rehabilitation Held** - On 28th April, 2013, Tazreen Fashions Fire Accident Victims Network organized a human chain to Demand Due Compensation and Rehabilitation for all Tazreen survivors with the support of OSHE Foundation on the occasion of World Day for Health and Safety at Work at 10:30 am in front of National Press Club. Some of Tazreen fire accident victims directly participated in the program. They asked for due compensation to the government and the foreign buyers. The victims took part in the human chain holding placards with their manifold demands to survive.

**Study Circle for Waste Pickers on OSH and the means of Organizing the Unorganized** - Two-hour long, six study circles were held on 07, 17 and 24 April, 2013 at OSHE Training and Welfare Centre, Matuail in Dhaka. A total of 90 waste pickers; 66 females and 24 males participated in these Study Circles. Each study circle had 15 participants. The objective of the Study Circle was to sensitize the waste pickers about their health & safety issues and the effective ways of organizing the unorganized. Each Study Circle had 2 sessions. The first session focused on the occupational health & safety and identification of core health problems of waste pickers and that was conducted by Ms. Farida Khanam. Moreover, the second session mainly focused on the means of organizing the unorganized and that was facilitated by Mrs. China Rahman.

All the participants took part in the program actively through sharing their knowledge and views.

**Study Circle on Occupational Safety & Health at Ship Breaking Yards** - Five numbers of Study Circles on Occupational Safety and Health were held on 06, 22 and 29 March, 05 and 12 April, 2013 at OSHE Training and Welfare Centre Vatinary, Sitakunda, Chittagong. A total of 75 ship breaking workers from different yards participated in the study circles. Mr. K.M Shahidullah, General Secretary, BFTUC was present as key discussant of these study circles. In his presentation, Mr. Shahidullah discussed on OSH provisions as per Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, such as issuing appointment letter, issuing identity card, fixing working hours, provision for leave, keeping favorable environment, maintaining air circulation, disposal of hazardous materials, lighting at work, work at height, safe use of machineries, safe weight lifting and use of personal protective equipments etc.
World Day for Health and Safety at Work 2013 Observed - On 28th April, 2013, Ministry of labour & Employment and OSHE Foundation jointly organized a national seminar on ‘Prevention of Occupational Diseases’ on the occasion of World Day for Health and Safety at Work at national press club VIP lounge. In the seminar, the experts urged all; including government and factory owners to ensure safe working environment, regular health check-up and health services as per the Labour Law.

In open discussion, the trade union leaders asked the government for taking rigorous steps against factory owners if their negligence kills workers. Furthermore, they urged the government to ensure the application of relating laws and strengthen the overall inspection or monitoring system.

As chief guest, Mr. Foyezur Rahman, Joint Secretary (Labour) of Ministry of labour & Employment commented that the government has already taken steps for amending the labour law. However, he emphasized on the improvement of labour inspection system and boosting tri-partite cooperation.

SHARPS

SHARPS is a network of workers with occupational diseases, their families, and activists from unions, human right groups, OSH groups, and other social movement groups

The number of occupational victims that SHARPS has gotten by the end of February 2013 is 208, among which 79 have already died. Most of them are from Samsung.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Victims</th>
<th>Deaths</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Samsung Electronics</td>
<td>136</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung Electro mechanics</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Samsung SDI</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung Corning</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samsung Techwin</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Others</strong></td>
<td>27</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>208</td>
<td>79</td>
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In 2012, the Korean government recognized aplastic anemia and breast cancer of two female workers from Samsung semiconductor as occupational diseases for the first time in the history. In addition, in 2013, the government decided to provide compensation to the family of late Kim Jinki, who had worked in Magnachip semiconductor as a maintenance engineer and died from leukemia at the age of 38. It was the first recognition of leukemia from semiconductor industry as an occupational disease.

SHARPS’ effort to raise awareness on the hazards of semiconductor industry got response from the academia, especially from the occupational health professionals. Korea Society of Occupational and Environmental Medicine and Korea Society of Industrial Hygiene had the official program on the issues of high-tech industry at their annual conference and invited speakers from SHARPS to share the knowledge and experiences.

The struggle of SHARPS got support from the people in art and culture. Two comic books based on the real stories of Samsung semiconductor occupational disease victims were published and have sold thousands of copies. Also, two movie have been made based on the victims’ story, one is a documentary and the other is a film drama.

According to increasing concern on the victims and the working environment, Samsung Electronics has been pressured to change its
attitude from concealing the problems into solving them. In late 2012, Samsung Electronics sent a letter to SHARPS under the name of its CEO asking for a dialogue. Based on the free and democratic discussion and decisions among the victims and the activists, SHARPS has taken preparatory meetings with the company for the official dialogue.

**IOHSAD**

The Institute for Occupational Health and Safety Development (www.IOHSAD.org) has started to increase capacity to address disasters by starting a Community-based Disaster Preparedness Program for vulnerable communities. Starting from the last quarter of 2011, IOHSAD has developed several training modules and established four Community-based Disaster Preparedness Committees (CDPC) in four Barangays in Quezon City, Philippines.

During the monsoon rains in 2012 which brought flooding to various parts of the Philippines, the four CDPC’s were active in assisting their affected communities. The Community-based Disaster Preparedness Program is an on-going initiative of IOHSAD and Mock Evacuation Exercises are currently in the pipeline for 2013.

Last March 2012, during the celebration of Womens Month, IOHSAD conducted a forum discussing Occupational Health and Safety Issues in the service sector. On March 2, 2013, workers from the Business Process Outsource (BPO) sector and the Banking and Finance Sector attended the forum “Women and Well-being” forum. Participants raised various issues, with special interest on work-related diseases like occupational cancer due to shift work and cardiovascular ailments.

For Workers Memorial Day 2013, IOHSAD has launched a photo contest depicting the working conditions of workers in the Philippines. Entitled “Litrato Obrero” (images of workers), the contest aims to crowdsource photos of working conditions in various workplaces and provide the general public powerful images to underscore the issue of OHS. This is first part of the project “Workingcast” where IOHSAD will be training workers to become citizen journalists, providing them skills in photography, news writing and social media. IOHSAD also released its OHS Statistics 2012 which gathered media attention and was able to raise awareness on OHS.

**IBAS**

The year began at a more leisurely pace than usual. Knowing that there were many important events on the horizon however provided the focus needed to concentrate on planning and implementation of upcoming events. A family trip to Australia provided the perfect opportunity for a series of discussions in March with asbestos victims’ campaigners, medical researchers, civil servants and Parliamentarians in Perth and Canberra. Meetings which took place in the capital with civil servants tasked with implementing Australia’s asbestos policy at the Rotterdam Convention were to prove crucial two months later when the Australian delegation led the fight-back against Russia’s asbestos veto in Geneva.

At a workshop held in the capital under the auspices of the Parliamentary Group on Asbestos Related Diseases on March 20, I was privileged to present a paper entitled: Australia’s Response to an Asbestos Pandemic: National, Regional and Global.

During this session and a subsequent conversation I had with Minister Bill Shorten, I urged Australia to provide leadership on the regional campaign to ban asbestos.

IBAS, in conjunction with the GMB trade union and the UK Forum of Asbestos Victims Support Groups, organized a demonstration for International Workers’ Memorial Day (IWMD) on Friday April 26, 2013 outside the Russian Embassy in London. This lively and colourful event was a
precursor to a similar protest held in Geneva on May 7, 2013 which attracted busloads of asbestos victims and supporters from Switzerland, France, Italy, the UK, Germany, the U.S., Canada and Kyrgyzstan.

The day after the London demonstration I flew to Istanbul where I took part in activities on April 28 to mark IWMD with Turkish colleagues. After a street manifestation in central Istanbul on Sunday morning, the country’s first public asbestos seminar was held at the headquarters of the Turkish Medical Association.

From May 7-10, 2013, IBAS was one of the organizations taking part in the Rotterdam Convention Alliance delegation at a United Nations meeting in Geneva. It was disturbing but important for civil society to witness first-hand the deadly work of asbestos delegations from Russia, Zimbabwe, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, Vietnam and India – now known as the "Dirty 7." IBAS was proud to stand shoullder-to-shoulder with Sugio Furuya from A-BAN, Fernanda Giannasi from ABREA and friends Barry Castleman, Kathleen Ruff, Alessandro Pugno and others. I have written extensively about what took place on the IBAS website [www.ibasecretariat.org].

I supported Eric Jonckheere at a press conference on May 15, 2013 to launch his organization’s new resource: a map showing the location and number of asbestos-related deaths and diseases near Belgium’s principal asbestos-cement factories.

**Initiative for OSH Rights and Social Network (LION) – Indonesia**

From February 2013, LION has started to conduct a factory exposure assessment on PT. Siamindo Concrete Product in Karawang. Siamindo Concrete Product is Asbestos factory, that been operational since May 1999, and had around 500 workers. Siamindo produces asbestos roof, woodplank, listplank, and roof knock. Asbestos fibres were imported from Canada, Uzbekistan, Russia, Brazil, and Kazakhstan. Since December, 2012, the workers in Siamindo had a new union. FSPK (Federasi Serikat Pekerja Kerakyatan). LION along with the union are undertaking the project.

The purpose of the project is for a local Indonesian non-governmental organization, LION, to conduct exposure assessments on factories and workers that process asbestos materials imported from international companies. The focus of this investigation will initially be an asbestos cement roofing factory located outside Jakarta. LION conducted a brief assessment of the site and that workers were required to wash their own work clothing at home, so family exposures are likely. During the initial review, employees were reporting lung symptoms.

A goal of the project will be to document and evaluate workplace exposures to asbestos. The work practices have been documented in Indonesian and will be translated into English. The workers are eager to participate and want to use the data for labor negotiations to reduce exposures.
Hesperian Health Guides

Chemical chart ready for review! We have developed charts for 100 commonly used chemicals in garment, shoe, and electronics production, and they are now awaiting your review and feedback. The charts are easy-to-read and simple, yet complete. They include information various ANROEV members have requested, such as how to identify a chemical by its qualities and uses, acute and chronic effects, and information about safer alternatives. Please consider serving as a reviewer; contact Miriam Lara for information.

Work Hazards almost complete! Industry-specific sections on electronics, garment, and shoe factories have been joined by expanded materials on ergonomic and chemical hazards, responding to feedback from workers (and ANROEV reviewers) about the need for more and more useful information on chemical and repetitive strain injuries. We are now working on 2 new chapters, on ventilation and personal protective equipment.

Expanded introductory section! We are finishing research for the context setting introduction on “Organizing for Safe and Fair Workplaces” to include “How to create a better factory,” “How to become an occupational health promoter,” and more activities.

Expanded resource section! We have begun to develop “Other resources and materials,” and would welcome any suggestions from members about what print and online materials (as well as activist organizations and networks) you find most useful.

A Trip to Remember

Yousuf Beg, an activist working with Stone quarry workers in Panna, Madhya Pradesh, India participated in the ANROEV meeting held from May 8-10, 2013 at Bangkok. Mr Beg has been working tirelessly on the issues of workers like Labour rights, safe and healthy working environment, compensation for workers and others. He has been at the forefront of the fight for the rights of Silicosis victims in the region.

Upon returning from Bangkok, he was greeted by a large number of workers and other activists from the region at the railway station. All along the way back to his home town of Panna, he was met by the workers and victims who appreciated his efforts to bring their voices and concerns to an international audience.

His visit was in the media limelight even before it began and stories regarding his visit were carried by all prominent local dailies. Despite encountering lots of problems with his passport issuance, he did not give up the struggle. We were not sure till even the date of the flight if he would be able to join us in Bangkok. Despite all the problems and hurdles put up by the Government administration, Yousuf Beg was able to join us in Bangkok and presented before us the ground realities of the stone quarry, crusher workers in Madhya Pradesh and his contributions towards the welfare of these workers.

Some press Clippings

How the shiny 'agate' stones in jewelry and rosary beads are killing workers

KHAMBHAT, India — A few years ago, when occupational safety activists came to Hydersha Diwan’s village here, 300 miles north of Mumbai, he drove them away with threats and bluster. Today, he wishes that he’d listened.

Doctors say the 50-year-old is dying of silicosis, a wasting lung disease that he contracted inhaling deadly silica dust as a grinder of agates —
colorful, semi-precious stones exported to the United States and other Western countries, and commonly used in silver and brass jewelry, rosary beads and home decorations.

“I was a supervisor for a grinding and polishing unit for 10 years or so,” says Diwan. “But when the workers stopped coming, I did the grinding myself for three or four years.”

Once a proud, muscular man, Diwan is hollow-eyed and emaciated, unable to sleep and hardly able to eat because of a relentless, hacking cough.

Throughout a GlobalPost interview with his family members, he slumps on the stoop of his home and coughs. The sound of it is horrible: a dry, futile rasp that yields no relief. It goes on and on, forcing a listener to imagine the sand that fills his lungs. Finally, he reels forward and spits a long, viscous trail of saliva onto the pavement, making it clear why he has positioned himself on the edge of the stoop. Then the coughing overcomes him again.

Some may call it poetic justice, given Diwan’s hostile reaction to the occupational safety activists.

Diwan’s workers “stopped coming” when the deaths of friends of co-workers made it impossible to deny that their jobs were killing them. Some failed to show up because they were dying themselves.

But silicosis is a fate too horrible to wish on anyone, and Diwan only bears a small portion of the blame for the disease that, mercifully, took his life as well, 10 days after he met with GlobalPost.

Agates at a mall near you

An opaque, semi-precious stone, an agate would be familiar to almost any American, even if the mineral’s name isn’t.

Agates vary in color from bright blue to glowing amber and deep black. They yield beautiful striped patterns when cut and polished. In addition to jewelry and rosary beads, they are used for decorative eggs, hearts and spheres and the like. New Age merchants market them as having the power to protect from stress, stomach pain, “energy drains” and even bad dreams. “This is the stone that everyone should have,” asserts one web retailer.

But the stone’s silica content means that grinders and polishers are highly susceptible to silicosis, or “grinder's asthma” — an incurable, tuberculosis-like occupational disease. That's especially true in India, where agate workers typically earn less than a dollar a day, and exploitative employment conditions prevent them from adopting even basic safety measures.

According to investigations by the Vadodara-based People's Training and Research Center(PTRC) and the Ahmedabad-based National Institute of Occupational Health (NIOH), agate grinding and polishing here ranks among the world’s most dangerous work. As many as a third of Khambhat agate workers develop silicosis.

Since the grinding and polishing work takes place in sheds and empty lots located in residential areas, it also claims one out of ten of the workers’ children and family members, who breathe the same deadly air.

Because of India’s disastrous preference for tiny, unregulated sweatshops over formal sector industries, there's no visible target like Foxconn to shoulder the blame — even though Khambhat exports hundreds of thousands of pounds of polished agate to be sold by US retailers each year.

And virtually nobody in India or abroad is doing anything to stop the killing of Khambhat's stone polishers.

“It’s not exactly rocket science. The cause of silicosis among gem cutters is known, and the means to prevent it are readily accessible,” said Brian Leber, chief executive of Chicago-based Leber Jeweler Inc. Leber has done extensive advocacy work to eliminate dangerous and exploitative labor practices in the colored gemstones industry worldwide.

Govt comes to silicosis victims' aid

JAIPUR: The labour department has directed Rajasthan Pneumoconiosis Medical Board to immediately issue individual medical certificates, under the provision of the Rajasthan Workmen Compensation Rules, 1965, certifying that 72 mine workers in Karauli district are suffering from silicosis.
The National Institute of Miners Health had earlier diagnosed these mine workers suffering from silicosis, an incurable occupational disease. The Mine Labour Protection Campaign Trust (MLPC) had raised the demand for compensation similar to that given to 21 widows of silicosis victims from Jodhpur, who were paid Rs 3 lakh each.

The certificates issued by the board will make the victims eligible for compensation under the Employees Compensation Act, 1923.

In a further development, the department of mines and geology has been asked to provide the list of mine lease holders to the director general of mines and safety, ministry of labour and to the regional labour commissioner, government of Rajasthan, so that cases can be filed against mine owners to pay compensation to the silicosis victims.

"This is the first time that the state government has taken a positive step to root out the problem, rather than a band-aid approach of paying compensation from the minister's relief fund, as was done earlier in the case of the 21 widows of silicosis victims from Jodhpur," said Rana Sengupta of the MLPC.

The certificates issued by the board will make the victims eligible for compensation under the Employees Compensation Act, 1923.

The Global Asbestos Congress 2000 had been our knock on the asbestos industry’s front door, and the IJOEH special issues pushed that door wide open. The publication of these issues gave legitimacy to the observations, measurements and data collected by combatants on the asbestos frontline: people who knew the asbestos reality all too well. The 32 papers in these two issues addressed a question posed by industry in the 1970s: “Where would we be without asbestos?” The ban asbestos campaign, which began as a grassroots activity on society’s outer fringes, has now entered mainstream national debates on social justice, environmental racism and sustainability. The IJOEH issues helped us achieve this transformation.
age in India will be 29 years, very likely of a city-dweller, making it the youngest country in the world.

The State of the Urban Youth India 2012: Employment, Livelihoods, Skills is published by IRIS Knowledge Foundation (IKF), Mumbai India for the UN-HABITAT Global Urban Youth Research Network (GUYRN) of which IKF is part. It is a first attempt to pull together a data and knowledge base on and of youth in urban India. The focus of the Report is youth employment and youth livelihoods in urban India. Through a three-city survey the Report incorporates a youth perspective on the situation of urban youth that is revealed by data and literature.

The Report rolls out a data embedded panorama of urban youth and provides the material for public debate on programmes and policies on youth employment, skill development and livelihoods. It does not aspire to make recommendations, but only to suggest broadly the need for a paradigm shift in addressing the issue of the urban young so that youth are in charge of change.

The Report evolved through discussion among scholars from different fields. In developing the Report the attempt has been to include youth voice and contribution. The field survey was mainly conducted by research students in the social sciences. Of the illustrations in the volume, seven photographs were winning contributions in a youth contest ‘Urban Shutter’ specially organized to generate photographs for the volume.

The Report is now available at: [Click here](#)

**Progress on asbestos in Iran**

On January 16, 2013, I had the privilege of making a presentation on asbestos to a group of medical doctors and interns at the University of Tehran Medical Sciences centre.

The medical community in Iran is well aware of the health hazards posed by asbestos and have made significant progress in stopping its use. They are hopeful that asbestos will, at some point soon, be banned.

Import of asbestos by Iran has plummeted over the past decade. Figures from Iran’s customs authorities show that only 9,000 metric tons of asbestos were imported in 2011 – a 90% drop from the 2003 figure of 83,000 metric tons (see graph).

The group of medical doctors and interns were interested to hear of the worldwide efforts to ban asbestos and, in particular, to learn how asbestos mining and export by Canada has finally stopped. They were concerned as to what should be strategic priorities in order to protect their population from suffering further harm from asbestos. Of course, the fundamental principle of health care is to prevent harm. Until such time as Iran bans asbestos, asbestos-containing products will continue to be imported, just as they are into Canada and the US and other countries that have not banned asbestos, thus placing the population at greater risk of harm.
Over half of the medical doctors and interns were women. They were particularly concerned to hear that asbestos has even been included in children's paint kits, exported by China.

I also had the privilege of visiting the Centre for Research on Occupational Disease in Tehran and meeting the doctors and researchers who work there.

Author Kathleen Ruff; Read More

Tributes

It’s a deep sadness to inform you all about passing away of Bro. M.R. Chowdhury, General Secretary of Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress (BFTUC) - a veteran trade unionist on 8 February 2013 (Friday, 12.15pm) at the National Chest Institute and Hospital, Dhaka. He was 68 (31-12-1944 to 8-02-2013).

Bro. Chowdhury was a committed soldier in the labour movement, and actively contributed to the goal of establishment of fundamental rights at work in Bangladesh as a responsible workers’ representative.

As per his last wish, Bro. M.R. Chowdhury has been buried at his beloved home town Chunaurughat, Hobigonj, Sylhet with due honor

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Kaluram S/o Mohanram Age 48 died of silicosis on January 26, 2013 in Rajasthan, India

Regional News

Joint Chemical Conference Disappoints Those Seeking Action on Asbestos, Paraquat

By Daniel Pruzin, Bloomberg BNA, Daily Report for Executives

GENEVA—The first-ever joint Conference of the Parties (COP) to the Basel, Rotterdam, and Stockholm conventions on the production and trade of hazardous chemicals and waste wrapped up May 10 with officials admitting the results were less than they had hoped for.

The two-week meeting in Geneva secured the approval of a new global ban on the production and use of the brominated flame retardant hexabromocyclododecane (HBCD) under the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) (88 DER A-14, 5/7/13).

However, a five-year exemption from the production ban was granted for use of HBCD in expanded polystyrene and extruded polystyrene in building insulation.

Delegates also agreed to new controls on international trade in four chemicals under the Rotterdam Convention on the prior informed consent (PIC) procedure for certain hazardous chemicals and pesticides.

The chemicals are azinphos methyl, an insecticide; perfluorooctane sulfonate (PFOS), its salts, and precursors, an industrial chemical used in a variety of products as a grease, oil, and water repellent; pentabromodiphenyl ether (penta-BDE) commercial mixtures, used as a flame retardant; and octabromodipheny ether (octa-BDE) commercial mixtures, also used as a flame retardant.

Listings of Two Substances Rejected

However, proposals for the listing of two additional and more widely traded chemicals and substances were blocked by a handful of countries. Russia, India, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Ukraine, Vietnam, and Zimbabwe blocked a proposal to list chrysotile asbestos under the Rotterdam Convention.

Earlier attempts to add chrysotile asbestos to the list were also rejected at Rotterdam COP meetings in 2006, 2008, and 2011 (90 DER A-34, 5/9/13).
In addition, Guatemala and India blocked a decision to subject paraquat dichloride, an herbicide used on a variety of agricultural products, to PIC requirements. Critics, including environmental groups, said the opposing countries were acting to protect their economic interests.

Under the Rotterdam Convention, a party that plans to export a chemical that is listed in Annex III of the convention and is banned or severely restricted for use within its territory must inform the importing party that such export will take place, before the first shipment and annually thereafter. All the chemicals and substances proposed for listing were previously approved by scientific experts on the convention’s Chemicals Review Committee (CRC) for listing in Annex III.

‘South-South’ Trade Noted

Jim Willis, executive secretary of the joint chemicals conventions secretariat, said it was notable that developing rather than industrialized countries blocked the listing of chrysotile asbestos and paraquat dichloride. “Some challenges remain in Rotterdam in listing chemicals with considerable economic or perceived economic value,” he admitted. “These are interesting challenges, because in both cases the countries that have reservations about adding the chemicals are developing countries.”

“What we have witnessed in the past two decades is a transition from the notion that the problems have been [trade] going from wealthy to poorer countries to trade that is almost equally south-south, both in chemicals and in waste,” he added.

Franz Perrez, president of the joint COP and head of the Swiss delegation to the meeting, expressed frustration with the outcome on paraquat dichloride.

One of the biggest producers of the herbicide is the Swiss chemical firm Syngenta, which produces paraquat dichloride under the trade name Gramoxone™ Super. Switzerland bans the use of the chemical at home.

“We’re very disappointed,” Perrez declared. “We have strongly supported the listing of paraquat and are deeply committed to doing everything to make it listed next time.”

Countries’ Arguments Said Out of Bounds

Perrez said a particular concern was that the reasons given for opposing the listing were “not within the philosophy of the convention,” which is to help countries having problems managing the import and use of hazardous chemicals and pesticides on their territory.

“By starting to use arguments that are totally outside of that philosophy, then we think that’s a problem for the functioning of the convention itself,” he declared. Willis insisted that it would be wrong to describe the joint COP meeting as a disappointment overall because two of the six proposed listings under Rotterdam were blocked.

“There were some outcomes that people would have like to see that didn't happen,” he said. “And there may be a tendency to magnify that because there were three conventions meeting this week. “It shouldn't take away from the great successes that the Rotterdam Convention has had. Adding this group of four chemicals is a particular success because they are known to be quite bad chemicals.”

Substances Stay on Agenda

Willis added that “one marvelous thing about the Rotterdam Convention” is that once a substance is recommended by the CRC for listing, it stays on the COP agenda until there is a decision. “A chemical that is not listed this time will be on the agenda at the next meeting, and if it's not added there, it's on the agenda for the subsequent meeting,” he said.

Achim Steiner, executive director of the U.N. Environment Program, said even though a proposed substance might not be approved by the COP, the fact that it will remain on the COP agenda “signals ultimately that the substance will in due course disappear.”

“What is sometimes unfortunate is that countries feel compelled, sometimes for very practical
reasons, to oppose simply to enable themselves to have more time to deal with very particular national circumstances,” Steiner said. “There are many countries that have invoked this tactic over time, and therefore the convention may need more time to reach a consensus across all member states.

“It’s very easy to say we’ve failed,” the UNEP chief added. “But the fact of the matter is that asbestos essentially has no future. ... Do you really believe that after everything that has been discussed here [industry] will invest in that material in the future? No, and in that sense the convention has a direct and indirect value in signaling what are the substances that are not likely to be in the global marketplace in the near or middle term.”

Activists Criticize Holdouts

Activist groups in attendance criticized the blocking of the chrysotile asbestos and paraquat dichloride listings.

Kathleen Ruff, founder of the Ottawa-based RightonCanada and a campaigner against the asbestos trade, said groups were “very disturbed that this conference has so greatly damaged the credibility of the Rotterdam Convention.”

“We have seen abuse of the convention by these seven countries who have raised arguments that are extraneous and irrelevant to the convention,” Ruff declared. “They are displaying contempt for the right of other countries to protect their borders and populations.”

Noting that Russia and Zimbabwe were participating in the COP for the first time as parties, Ruff said, “It’s very clear they are concerned about their commercial interests and their asbestos industry. ... It appears clear to us they have ratified the convention in order to wreck it.”

Economic Considerations at Work

Russia is by far the largest exporter of chrysotile asbestos, accounting for three-quarters of the 1 million tons exported in 2011. Brazil, the world's second largest exporter, declined to take a position at the meeting.

Zimbabwe announced in advance of the COP meeting that it would oppose the listing of chrysotile asbestos. The government is currently looking for investors to reopen the country’s chrysotile asbestos mines.

“There are clear economic considerations that do sometimes factor into situations like this, particularly when economic circumstances are difficult, which they are now for many countries,” Willis noted. “It’s unfortunate,” he added, “but there are well over 40 chemicals listed on the Rotterdam Convention, we added another 10 percent this week, and so this is an indication [that] for all but a few countries there is keen interest in continuing to strengthen the convention.”

Barry Castleman, an environmental consultant and an observer at the meetings, said India's position on chrysotile asbestos was driven strictly by commercial interests.

“India has a very powerful asbestos industry, and the use of asbestos is going up very rapidly,” Castleman said, noting that India is second only to China in domestic asbestos consumption. “In order to maintain its profitability, the industry has to avoid the cost of prevention and compensation [to workers]. They've done it very well in India.

“There are members of Parliament in India who have financial interests in the asbestos industry, and there are asbestos companies that have media interests in India,” he added. “This is why India has played a leading role at the COP in blocking the listing not only of asbestos but also paraquat at this conference.”

Indian Negotiator Defends Position

Shashi Shekhar, secretary to the Indian Ministry of Environment and Forests and head of the Indian delegation to the COP meeting, said India’s objections to both asbestos and paraquat were based on scientific as well as commercial grounds.

“We've carried out our own study with the National Institute of Professional Health and they
have not found anything serious among the workers that are engaged in the manufacture of asbestos sheet,” he said. “We have not found any serious health concerns.”

Shekhar said asbestos is used in only two limited sectors in India—for the manufacture of asbestos sheet used as a roofing material in low-income housing, and in water piping. “In both cases detailed studies have been carried out and nothing has been found which raised concerns for human health or the environment.”

The asbestos industry “is a billion-dollar industry in our country, with more than 20,000 workers,” he added. “Without having adequate information [to justify action], we thought it was not an appropriate time to commit to a ban. We need to do more studies and then we'll make a call on that.”

**Paraquat Recommendation Questioned**

In regards to paraquat dichloride, Shekhar said India had problems accepting international restrictions for various reasons.

First, the proposed recommendation for the listing covered specific liquid formulations (emulsifiable concentrate and soluble concentrate) containing paraquat dichloride at or above 276 grams per liter, corresponding to paraquat ion at or above 200 grams per liter. “We do not know on what basis this [recommendation] has come,” he said.

In addition, Shekhar said the CRC issued its recommendation on paraquat dichloride “based on one country's notification [from Burkina Faso] and without going into a detailed investigation.”

“You shouldn't recommend anything that will have implications all over the world based on the experience of one country, and the experience of that country is, to my knowledge, not well investigated. That's why we said it doesn't meet the listing criteria laid out in the rules.”

Shekhar said India currently imports paraquat dichloride at a concentration below 276 grams per liter and then further dilutes it before it is used as a herbicide. While putting the herbicide on the Rotterdam PIC list would not prohibit its trade, he argued, it would severely curb it, to the detriment of the country's poor farmers who depend on the herbicide to protect their crops.

“The moment it is listed you have to go through major bureaucratic hurdles to ship,” Shekhar said. “And then the costs go up. We cannot afford to increase input costs. Our farmers are already hard-pressed, and we can't put them through further distress.”

**Russian Group Cites Potential Job Loss**

The head of a Russian-based labor group called the International Trade Union Movement for Chrysotile also backed the rejection of the chrysotile asbestos PIC listing on economic grounds.

“Fifty thousand workers will lose their jobs in Russia” if chrysotile asbestos is banned, declared Andrey Kholzakov, president of the group and a representative from the Russian Construction and Building Materials Industry Workers’ Union.

Kholzakov said there was still no scientific consensus on the danger of chrysotile asbestos to human health and that claims of 100,000 deaths each year from asbestos contamination were “exaggerated.”

According to the World Health Organization, more than 107,000 people die each year from asbestos related lung cancer, mesothelioma, and asbestosis resulting from occupational exposure.

**Tamil Nadu Cements to increase production**

Cement production capacity at State-run Tamil Nadu Cements Corporation will be increased to 19-lakh tonnes a year from the current 7-lakh tonnes, according to the policy note on Industries Department tabled in the Assembly on Friday.

Tancem, as the Rs 250-crore Cements Corporation is known, has two cement factories at Alangulam and Ariyalur. The Alangulam unit, which produces about two lakh tonnes of cement annually, is to be modernised at a cost of Rs 195 crore including Rs 50 crore for mine development.
It will get a Rs 95-crore support from the State Government through ways and means advance and interest free loan. The Ariyalur unit expansion will be implemented once the detailed project report being done by a private consultancy is completed.

Tancem also operates an asbestos sheet unit and a stoneware pipe unit. The asbestos sheet unit with a production capacity of about 28,800 tonnes a year will import asbestos fibre from Russia. It has engaged Tamil Nadu Newsprint and Papers Ltd to import the fibre and the first consignment of 495 tonnes have been received, the policy note said.

Chennai, April 19, 2013: Read More

The New York Times Wins Pulitzer Prize for iEconomy Series on Apple

The New York Times has won the 2013 Pulitzer Prize for “Explanatory Reporting” for its nine-part iEconomy series into Apple’s business practices and the working conditions inside Foxconn's Chinese factories.

The Times was praised for its “penetrating look into business practices by Apple and other technology companies that illustrates the darker side of a changing global economy for workers and consumers.”

The Times beat Dan Egan of the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and Tony Bartelme of The Post and Courier to the $10,000 prize. Its iEconomy series gave us an insight into how Apple's hugely popular iOS devices are manufactured in China, and the unpleasant working conditions faced by Foxconn staff. The series included nine parts in total Read More

Federal budget finally buries asbestos industry

OTTAWA – If the asbestos industry in Canada was on life-support, last week's federal budget finally pulled the plug.

It was hidden midway through the budget papers, amid the more flashy and noticeable cuts to the cost of baby clothes and the "largest long-term federal commitment to Canadian infrastructure in our nation's history."

"Supporting the Economic Transition of Communities Economically Linked to the Chrysotile Asbestos Industry," said the headline on page 241.

"Historically, the chrysotile asbestos industry has been a significant employer in the communities of Thetford Mines and Asbestos in the province of Quebec," reads the section. "Due to the decline of the industry, these communities are now exploring ways to diversify their local economies and create new jobs. Confirming the commitment made by the government in September 2012, Economic Action Plan 2013 proposes to provide $50 million over seven years to Canada Economic Development for Quebec regions to support economic diversification efforts in the communities of Thetford Mines and Asbestos."

The money was actually first promised last September, announced by Christian Paradis, the country's industry minister, who also represents Thetford Mines and Asbestos in Parliament and was born in Thetford Mines.
The budget delivered on the promise.

For years, Liberal and Conservative governments held their fingers in their ears as the evidence mounted about the dangers of asbestos. it to developing countries and kept giving the Chrysotile Institute money to promote the product.

So what suddenly changed?

In November 2011, the last of the mines stopped operating.

Then, last fall, the Parti Québécois won the election in Quebec and Premier Pauline Marois pledged to pull the plug on a proposal by Liberal Premier Jean Charest to loan the asbestos industry $58 million. It was the last of the few lifelines left for the industry.

Without any mines operating and the promise of reopening off the table, the political need to keep supporting asbestos was finally outweighed by the political damage of supporting it.

So it was that Canada finally said it would stop opposing the addition of chrysotile asbestos to the Rotterdam Convention.

How Canada handles that matter will be seen next month during the annual meeting of the Rotterdam Convention.

Manitoba MP Pat Martin, who worked in asbestos mines in the Yukon and has some lung damage because of it, has been fighting against the industry for years.

He said the government deciding to finally find something else for the two asbestos towns to do is "the final nail in the coffin."

But he won't stop his crusade against the industry just yet. "I won't stand down until they ban asbestos in all its forms," said Martin.

Author: Mia Rabson  Read More

WASHINGTON — A Michigan computer company and its owner were sentenced today for trafficking in counterfeit goods and services and violating environmental laws.

U.S. District Judge David M. Lawson sentenced Mark Jeffrey Glover, to 30 months in prison and a $10,000 fine, and his company, Discount Computers, Inc. (DCI), a $2 million fine with $10,839 in restitution to Mich. landlord, for trafficking in counterfeit goods and services. DCI was also sentenced for storing and disposing of hazardous waste without a permit. Glover pleaded guilty to the charges on his behalf and that of his company in October 2012.

DCI, headquartered in Canton, Mich., with warehouses in Maryland Heights, Mo., and Dayton, N.J., operated as a broker of used electronic components, including computers and televisions. DCI resold working and disassembled broken items, selling them for scrap. A large part of DCI’s business involved exporting used cathode ray tube (CRT) monitors to countries in the Middle East and Asia.

Egypt prohibits the importation of computer equipment which is more than five years old. To evade this requirement, all three DCI locations replaced the original factory labels on used CRT monitors with counterfeit labels, which reflected a more recent manufacture date. Over a five-year period, DCI sent at least 300 shipments to Egypt, with a total shipment value of at least $2.1 million, constituting more than 100,000 used CRTs monitors.

Under federal law it is illegal to knowingly use a counterfeit mark on or in connection with goods and services for the purpose of deceit or confusion. It is also illegal to store and dispose of hazardous waste, which includes certain electronic waste, or e-waste, without a permit.

Lass from older CRT monitors is known to contain levels of lead, which is toxic hazardous waste. When deposited in a landfill the lead can leach out and contaminate drinking water supplies.

As a result, these types of monitors are required to be disposed of as hazardous waste under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act. By exporting older CRTs with fraudulent manufacture dates, Mark Jeffrey Glover sent a large quantity of older e-waste overseas which
was subjected to improper recycling, increasing the potential for environmental and human exposure to hazardous materials.

“EPA is committed to taking action on illegal exports of e-waste because they often end up in countries that lack the capacity to manage them safely,” said Cynthia Giles, assistant administrator for EPA’s Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance. “Today’s sentence, the first in an e-waste case, should serve as a warning that if you are caught illegally exporting hazardous e-waste for profit, there will be serious consequences.”

“Mr. Glover and his company falsified labels to conceal the age of computer monitors and their potential for hazardous waste,” said Barbara L. McQuade, United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Michigan. “We hope this case will encourage others to comply with laws designed to protect drinking water and prevent human exposure to toxic waste.”

"When potentially hazardous e-waste is not properly disposed of, human lives can seriously be impacted," said William Hayes, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Homeland Security Investigations in Detroit. "The investigation confirmed that the defendant repeatedly and illegally exported used cathode ray tubes overseas. Homeland Security Investigations stands with our law enforcement partners ready to prevent any company from ignoring U.S. controls to export hazardous e-waste." E-waste is a global concern because used electronic equipment contains more than 1,000 different substances including toxic heavy metals and organics that, if disposed of improperly, can cause significant pollution problems. Improper e-waste disposal is common in third world and developing countries because they are ill equipped for proper recycling, refurbishing, and disposal. It is also common in these countries to find black-market recycling groups that extract valuable metals from e-waste without regard for the safety of their impoverished employees who are exposed directly to toxic materials.


More information about EPA’s criminal enforcement program

Release Date: 03/25/2013 Read More

Disposal of Older Monitors Leaves a Hazardous Trail

“Most experts say that the larger solution to the growing electronic waste problem is for technology companies to design products that last longer, use fewer toxic components and are more easily recycled. Much of the industry, however, seems to be heading in the opposite direction.”

“As recently as a few years ago, broken monitors and televisions like those piled in the warehouse were being recycled profitably. The big, glassy funnels inside these machines — known as cathode ray tubes, or CRTs — were melted down and turned into new ones.

But flat-screen technology has made those monitors and televisions obsolete, decimating the demand for the recycled tube glass used in them and creating what industry experts call a “glass tsunami” as stockpiles of the useless material accumulate across the country.”

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Ministry: Bile duct cancers work-related (Japan)

The health ministry said Thursday it will approve applications for compensation on behalf of 16 people who say they developed bile duct cancer while working for a printer in Osaka.

The Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry instructed the Osaka Labor Bureau to approve the applications by the end of the month. It will be the first time accident compensation insurance benefits has been authorized for bile duct cancer.

A ministry panel concluded that the 16 people, seven of whom have died, developed the cancer after working at Sanyo-CYP Co. over long periods in an environment in which the air contained a high density of an organic chlorine cleaning agent known as 1,2-dichloropropan.

The victims had no other causal factors, such as chronic diseases, that would result in bile duct
cancer, according to the panel. A report compiled by the panel showed the risk of a worker in the company's printing section developing bile duct cancer is around 1,200 times higher than the average for Japanese men.

Bile duct cancer is more common among the elderly, but the 16 print workers contracted the disease while relatively young. One died while still in his 20s, and seven developed the cancer in their 30s, three of whom died. The other eight contracted the disease in their 40s, and three of them died.

Based on the opinion of experts cited in the report, the ministry also took into account a similar organic chlorine cleaning solvent called dichloromethane as a possible cause of the cancer.

Regarding applications for compensation from 47 people who claim to have developed bile duct cancer while working at printers in Miyagi Prefecture and Fukuoka Prefecture, among other locations, the ministry will from April examine the possible causal relationship between the solvent and the disease.

The statute of limitations for work-related compensation is five years from the death of the applicant. But the ministry designated Friday as the start date of the five-year period for bile duct cancer caused by the two chemical substances, as the possible link between the disease and the nature of the job was only recently acknowledged.

Noting that the causal relationship has yet to be fully substantiated, the report said that if new evidence appears, the decision as to whether the disease was induced by work should be based on the new findings.

Shingo Honda, 31, who has bile duct cancer, welcomed the government's move, saying he won't have to worry about medical bills any more, but he also lamented that other people's lives might have been saved if the company had taken appropriate steps.

"I have had nights worried sick that I might die," said Honda, who was diagnosed with the disease in September 2012.

MAR 15, 2013; Read More

Voice against noise

SURAT: Arvind Gayatri, 42, a weaving supervisor in a textile unit at Bhathena, has problem in hearing. He has been working in the powerloom unit for years. The constant sound of the machines has taken its toll on his ear drums.

Munna Sahukar, a native of Burhanpur in Uttar Pradesh, has been driving auto-rickshaw in the city for the past five years. He too suffers from hearing problem caused by different types of horns of vehicles. "I can't hear if you speak softly," he said.

"This is a common occurrence in urban life. I realized the gravity of it while working for my NGOs Saraswati Education Trust and Telugu Foundation Trust," said founder of the NGOs and BJP councillor PVS Sharma.

The permissible level of sound in Surat city is 60 decibels. However, the sound level at many places is as high as 90 decibels. In this background, three ear and throat specialists, two psychiatrists, two chartered accountants and Sharma, who is a former Income Tax officer, have set up Shantam Foundation to help reduce noise pollution in the city. The slogan of their NGO is 'Voice against noise'. The founders claim that this is first of its kind NGO in the country to take up the problem of noise pollution.

"We all are aware about noise pollution but don't know about its effects on one's body and mind. High decibel level of sound can create irritation and lead to depression besides affecting our hearing," said Dr Mukul Choksi, a founder member of Shantam Foundation.

"Our volunteers will create awareness among people about the effects that sound pollution has on people through practical demonstrations. We have devised a programme to train children of city schools to fight noise pollution. They would be trained to talk to auto and car drivers to cooperate in not spreading noise pollution. We will start from schools, hospitals and main road junctions," Sharma added.

Read More

Workers decry lack of health and safety in factories, workplaces

KARACHI: Trade union leaders and representatives of labour rights organisations
have expressed their concern over absence and lack of occupational health and safety facilities at factories and other work places and demanded the government to ensure availability of these facilities which are mandatory under Factories Act 1934.

They were speaking at a seminar on occupational health and safety organised by The Hosiery Garment General Worker's General Union at Delhi Community Hall in Baldia Town No 3 here on Sunday.

Speakers and worker organisation representatives in their speeches expressed regret that labour laws were not being observed in most of garment factories. Labour laws were present, however they were not being followed at any workplace. If factory owners implemented these laws, then fatal tragedies like the Baldia factory fire could be avoided. Fires often break out at factories due to old and faulty electrical wiring. However, factory owners did not pay attention to these dangers. Inspection teams often accept bribes and leave the factories without conducting proper inspections. There are extreme limitations when it comes to labour rights in this country, despite the fact that factory owners have been instructed to maintain healthy and safe working environments. According to a survey, workers were not given appropriate equipment like masks or gloves when at work. Similarly, workers involved with bleaching and dying said that there were no arrangements in place for proper ventilation or drainage at their workplace. Cool drinking water was also not available to workers at most places. Furthermore, there were no arrangements in place for female workers, and there were no separate toilets for them either. Factory workers are not aware of the fact that they have occupational health and safety rights. Old and outdated wiring in factories is also the cause of short circuiting which leads to fire outbreaks. Even if fire extinguishing facilities are in place, they are often outdated and inadequate. In the event of an emergency, often there is only a single exit which is too narrow to accommodate a timely escape, resulting in the killing and waste of many human lives.

The Executive Director of PILER Karamat Ali said that there is an urgent need for a worker-led organisation in the garment sector. All workers in Sindh needed to be united, he added. The health and safety issues are especially pertinent for women workers. A female garment worker Nazia said that industries and factories are run by workers, and that her husband was killed in the Baldia factory fire. However, she has still not received the body of her husband, nor has she received any compensation from the government. She emphasized the need for all workers to unite and become one voice in their struggle.

All Pakistan Trade Union Federation President Habib Udin Junedi, Port Worker's Federation President Noor Muhammad, SITE Labour Forum Senior Vice President Gul Rehman, PIA Union leader Sheikh Majeed, Watan Dost Federation representative Shireen Zadah, National Trade Union Federation representative Riaz Abbasi and KESC People's Labour Bureau representative Latif Mughal said that despite the coverage of the OHS laws in the Factory's Act, the health and safety situation in factories and industry is highly unsatisfactory. The OHS system is deteriorating day by day. They demanded that OHS laws be aggressively and widely publicized via print and electronic media, and that employers, labour representatives and unions, doctors and other related authorities should be given training and education on OHS implications of technology used in workplaces. OHS committees should be formed on the plant-level with labour and employer representatives. The emissions, polluted water and hazardous gases produced by industrial and trade organization should be monitored and these organizations should be made to adhere to national and international environmental standards.

Members of civil society and worker organisations, as well as victims and relatives of the deceased of the Baldia factory fire participated in the seminar. Union President Rafique, Vice President Noor Muhammad, General Secretary Rehana Yasmeen, Finance Secretary Muhammad Mohib, Education Secretary Muhammad Akram and Office Secretary Sarfaaraz Alam also spoke at the event.
Bihar Chief Minister promises to ‘puncture’ construction of asbestos factories
Chief Minister’s environment friendly intervention welcomed
Memorandum demands stoppage of asbestos factory and withdrawal of fake cases

Patna/New Delhi February 14, 2013: Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar met the leaders of ban asbestos movement led by Vaishali’s Khet Bachao Jeevan Bachao Jan Sangharsh Committee (KBJBJC) and the leaders of left parties and promised to ‘puncture’ construction of asbestos factories in the State. The Chief Minister met the leaders at his residence at 1, Anne Marg in Patna in the evening hours of on February 13, 2013. The Hindi Press Release of Khet Bachao Jeevan Bachao Jan Sangharsh Committee (KBJBJC) and their Memorandum to the Chief Minister is attached.

This announcement of the Chief Minister follows declaration of Shri Awadhesh Narain Singh, Chairman, Bihar Legislative Council saying ‘buying asbestos is akin to buying cancer’ at a conference on environmental and occupational health on December 24, 2012, in his address to the health experts, scientists, trade union leaders, academicians, civil society leaders and villagers. The conference also adopted a Patna Declaration urging State of Bihar to ban Asbestos Product Use and to ban Asbestos Product Use. Speech of Chairman, Bihar Legislative Council is available here. The Declaration which has been submitted to the Chief Minister is attached.

Officials present at the meeting suggested a campaign to end the use of asbestos based products in the State.

Bihar Chief Minister expressed outrage at the granting of ‘No Objection Certificate’ by Bihar State Pollution Control Board (BSPCB) to hazardous asbestos based factories in fertile agricultural lands.

In a remarkable move Bihar Chief Minister phoned Chairman, BSPCB and fixed an appointment for the villagers of Vaishali for February 14 and expressed his disapproval for asbestos based factories to him in front of the leaders of the left parties and the villagers’ committee.

Villagers met the Chairman, BSPCB today. The Chairman spoke to District Magistrate, Vaishali and assured the villagers of necessary action for cancelling the approval given to the asbestos company’s plant.

The current status of the asbestos factories in Bihar is as under:
1) Kolkata based UAL Industries Ltd for Establishment of 2,33,000 MT per year capacity Asbestos Cement Sheet and Corrugated Sheets Plant in two phases at Goraul, Vaishali in the name of UAL-Bihar. Earlier it was proposed at Bakhtiyarpur. This has been suspended temporarily

2) Chennai based Ramco Industries Ltd for establishment of 1,20,000 MT/Annnum Capacity of Asbestos Cement Sheet Plant and 2 Lakh MT/Annnum Capacity of Cement Grinding Plant at Industrial Area, Bhiya, Bhojpur. In his speech of Chairman, Bihar Legislative Council available above on the youtube, he expressed concern about this plant.

3) Chennai based Nibhi Industries Pvt. Ltd for establishment of the One Lakh MT Capacity Asbestos Fiber Cement Corrugated Sheet, Flat Sheet and Accessories and Light Weight Fly Ash Block Plant at Industrial Growth Centre, Giddha, Ara, Bhojpur. In his speech of Chairman, Bihar Legislative Council available above on the youtube, he expressed concern about this plant. This has been taken on lease by Utkal Asbestos Limited (UAL) in a strategic move realizing that construction of its asbestos based plant will not be allowed by the villagers of Vaishali.

4) Andhra Pradesh based Hyderabad Industries Ltd for establishment of 2,50,000 MT per year capacity Asbestos Cement Sheeting Plant in two Phases at Kumarbagh Industrial Area, West Champaran

5) Kolkata based Balmukund Cement & Roofings Ltd for establishment of 1.5 Lakh MT capacity production unit of Asbestos Fiber Cement Sheet (Corrugated/Flat) and Accessories at Chainpur-Bishunpur, Marwan, Muzaffarpur. This has been stopped following bitter struggle of villagers of Marwan block of Muzaffarpur.

6) Rajasthan based A Infrastructure Ltd for establishment of 1,25,000 MT per year capacity Asbestos Cement (A.C.) Sheet and 1,00,000 MT per year capacity A.C. Pressure Pipe at Pandal Industrial Area, Madhubani.
Following Chief Minister's intervention Bihar's State Investment Promotion Board (SIPB) and the State Cabinet must disapprove asbestos based industrial projects and rescind earlier approvals.

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**Australian agency to help regulate use of asbestos in Laos**

Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA (Australian People for Health, Education and Development Abroad) will help Laos to manage the use of asbestos in industrial processing to reduce the impact on people's health.

An agreement for a data collection survey on the impact of asbestos was signed yesterday in Vientiane between the Mekong Regional Manager of Union Aid Abroad - APHEDA, Mr Phillip Hazelton, and the Deputy Director of the Industry and Handicraft Department, Mr Sompong Soulivanh.

This assistance represents the start of cooperation to regulate the use of asbestos in Laos in line with international principles.

The project will first focus on collecting information to raise awareness about the use of asbestos among business operators, and formulate regulations. The next phase will create a strategy as a tool for implementation, said Mr Somphong.

The first phase will run until June, and Mr Somphong said he believed more funding would be forthcoming for the next stage.

Asbestos has been used in a wide range of manufactured goods, mostly in building materials (roofing shingles, ceiling and floor tiles, paper products, and cement products), friction products (automobile clutch, brake, and transmission parts), heat-resistant fabrics, packaging, gaskets, and coatings.

The mineral has been used around the world for more than 2,000 years but its use grew significantly in the 19th century as industry expanded.

Today, scientists believe that asbestos represents a severe danger to human health. It affects the respiratory system and lungs and leads to lung cancer, Mr Somphong said.

Researchers are now finding new materials to replace asbestos and many countries have stopped using it altogether.

However, if a country stops using asbestos in industrial processing, cooperation from neighbouring countries is required so that contamination from this harmful mineral does not cross borders.

Laos uses asbestos in the manufacture of roofing tiles, with the material mostly imported from Russia and Kazakhstan since 2002, Mr Somphong said.

Laos imports a kind of asbestos called Chrysotile, buying about 5,300 tonnes annually for supply to 13 factories. APHEDA is the Humanitarian Aid Agency of the Australian Council of Trade Unions. It was founded in 1984 and has been working in Laos since 2001.

The agency focuses on decent work conditions, occupational health and safety, vocational training for women through the Lao Women's Union, trade union capacity building, and teacher training.

The World Health Organisation estimates that 107,000 people globally die globally from asbestos-related diseases, said Mr Hazelton.

About 54 countries have banned asbestos. China's Hong Kong will ban it this year, Taiwan will ban roofing sheets containing the mineral from this month, and Thailand and Malaysia are considering banning asbestos.


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**Some articles on Asbestos Issue after Tsunami in Japan**
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Tsunami leaves Japan with toxic asbestos legacy – read More

Asbestos safety measures lacking as workers dismantle buildings in disaster areas- Read More

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Articles on Asbestos Issue on IBAS website

1. China: as of June 1, 2011 the use of all types of asbestos, including chrysotile, is banned in siding and wall construction materials under Chinese national standard GB50574-2010: "Uniform technical code for wall materials used in buildings"; this is likely to decrease demand for asbestos-cement flat sheet products generally used in permanent constructions. Read National Asbestos Bans


3. The First International Conference of Asbestos Information Bodies – Read More

4. Health Screening for Asbestos Workers in Germany – Read More

5. Russia’s Olympic Asbestos policy – Read More

6. International Workers Memorial Day 2013 - Read More

7. Action on Russian asbestos - Read More

IRSST Studies Construction Workers’ Exposure to Silica

A new study on construction workers’ exposure to crystalline silica was released this month by the Institut de recherché Robert-Sauvé en santé et en sécurité du travail (IRSST), a nonprofit scientific research organization in Québec, Canada. Researchers ultimately developed a database to help facilitate the identification of construction tasks and tools that most expose workers to silica, as well as the job designations associated with the highest risk.

Tasks and tools that may expose workers to silica at levels above Québec’s regulatory level include sawing masonry pieces with portable masonry saws, roughening (bushhammering), cracking masonry pieces (hammer drills and jackhammers on concrete or ceramic), tunneling, and grinding joints of brick or stone. Study results suggest that heavy equipment operators and employees working underground form the group at the highest risk for exposure to silica, with exposure levels two to four times greater than Québec’s regulatory limit. Cement finishers, bricklayers, drillers, semiskilled workers, and skilled operators of heavy equipment used for milling roads form a second group exposed, on average, to levels above or near Québec’s prescribed level.

According to IRSST’s literature search, the presence of silica in many basic construction materials makes substitution “highly impractical” as an approach to eliminating hazards most of the time, but researchers note that substitution must also be encouraged where possible. Further, data collected during the study show that technical means of controlling exposure, such as spraying and local exhaust ventilation, promote a significant decrease in the concentration of silica in the air, but the report states that these measures do not allow compliance with exposure limits in most cases. Researchers recommend optimizing these engineering controls, improving the tuning and maintenance of tools and equipment, and adopting work methods that limit the emission of dust. Respiratory protection is also recommended.

The report is available for download on IRSST’s website. For more information on IRSST, visit the organization’s home page.

Audits missed factory hazards; 400 workers died

Two clothing factories in Bangladesh and Pakistan were inspected for safety conditions by independent auditing firms prior to 2012 fires that killed hundreds of employees, according to a new report by the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) and the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO).

Entitled ‘Fatal Fashion,’ the report describes a fatal September 2012 blaze at Ali Enterprises in Karachi, in a November 2012 factory fire at Tazreen Fashions Limited in Dhaka. Both companies produce apparel for European and
American clothing brands and retailers, including Walmart. More than 400 workers were killed in the incidents and many others were severely injured. Sub-standard buildings, poor emergency procedures, blocked fire exits, and overcrowded workplaces have been blamed for the high death toll. To date, the lion share of workers and families affected by the fires in Karachi and Dhaka have not yet received any compensation.

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**A cadmium lining; The politics of e-waste**

POOR countries have long been a popular destination for the rich world’s toxic trash. In 1987 an Italian importer sparked international outrage by dumping 8,000 leaky barrels in the Nigerian village of Koko. On January 9th Nigeria fined importers $1m for trying to bring in two 12-metre containers full of defunct televisions, computers, microwaves and stereos, aboard a ship from Tilbury in Britain—the fifth such incident in three years.

Waste consisting of dead electronic goods, or e-waste, is growing at three times the rate of other kinds of rubbish, fuelled by gadgets’ diminishing lifespan and the appetite for consumer electronics among the developing world’s burgeoning middle classes. In 1998 America discarded 20m computers; by 2009 that number had climbed to 47.4m. China alone retired 160m appliances in 2011, 40% of America’s haul. A 2011 report by Pike Research, a consultancy, estimates that the volume and weight of global e-scrap will more than double in the next 15 years.

International efforts to regulate the trade in waste revolve around the Basel Convention, passed in 1989 following the Koko row. It aims to stop the rich world dumping its harmful detritus in poor countries. But e-waste is not just poisonous: it contains precious metals, too. Processors, chips and connecting pins (known as “gold fingers”) contain seams of silver, gold and palladium; these “deposits” are 40 to 50 times richer than dug-up ores, according to a study conducted by the United Nations University. Other less valuable and more troubling lodes for “urban miners” include cadmium, lead and mercury.

High-tech recyclers—such as Umicore in Belgium and Xstrata in Canada—can recover up to 95% of the metal using furnaces and solvents. But dirtier methods are cheaper. In the Guiyu area of southern China 100,000 people work in e-waste recycling. It is “ground zero for the e-waste trade,” says Jim Puckett of the Basel Action Network, a green group. Standard practice is to separate the plastic by boiling circuit boards on stoves, and then leach the metals with acid. Workers risk burns, inhaling fumes and poisoning from lead and other carcinogens. A study by the nearby Shantou University found high miscarriage rates in local women.

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All readers are welcome to provide feedback and suggestions to articles of OSH Rights. In the coming issues, we will offer space for reader feedback.

For any questions about Occupational Health and Safety in Asia, send an email to anroev@gmail.com. Our panel of experts will attempt to reply to all questions.

**Contact Us - Secretariat**

Environics Trust
Khasra Number 177, Neb Sarai, IGNOU Road,
New Delhi – 110068, India
Email – anroev@gmail.com
URL - www.anroev.org