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.

Articles and information in OSH Rights may be reproduced in non-profit publications with clear citations, credit to author/s and OSH Rights.

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
URL - www.anroev.org
Facebook - http://www.facebook.com/Anroev

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.
Occupational Health Practitioners for Change

A large Asian workforce is falling prey to Occupational Diseases (ODs) like Silicosis, Asbestosis, Noise Induced Hearing Loss (NIHL), Byssinosis, Musculo-skeletal problems, chemical and metal toxicity etc. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO) approximately 1.1 million workers die in Asia every year due to work place related accidents and diseases. A large number of workers, however, are not diagnosed as suffering from ODs. Workers are mis-diagnosed in numerous cases and are not informed about the disease they are suffering from. In almost all Asian countries, there is a severe dearth of physicians who can examine workers and make the co-relation with their occupational history and diagnose the illness as an occupational disease, thereby offering guidance to the worker regarding the harmful effects of their work conditions and steps to be taken to prevent their illnesses. The Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims (ANROEV) in collaboration with Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) organised the First training on Occupational and Environmental Health for Medical Practitioners from October 12-16 in Penang, Malaysia. The training was held in Collaboration with the University of Illinois, California, University Sans Malaysia and National Institute of Occupational Health, South Africa. More than 15 doctors from different Asian Countries attended the training. Concepts covered included interpretation of ILO Radiographs, Audiometry, Spirometry, Occupational Hygiene among others. The Medical Practitioners were also explained the concepts Work Environment surveys, History taking of the worker. A field visit was undertaken to showcase the work conditions which the Medical Practitioners are usually unaccustomed with. Workers suffering from Lung Diseases were also present to help the doctors understand their suffering and gain knowledge about the steps in diagnosis. The participants will form an action plan to utilise the training with the help of the local grass root organisation in each country. Regular assignments to further enhance the knowledge will also be sent to all participants. Although the participants expressed some disinterest with the length of theory sessions, all of them expressed great satisfaction with the overall training and stated that the training was extremely useful and will be implemented in their area of work.
November 20 was the 7th anniversary of SHARPS. We cheered up each other. There were many achievements in the year of 2014; the leukaemia of Yu-mi Hwang, our first victim, got finally the legal recognition as the occupational disease after seven years’ struggle; two movies on our story, Another Promise and the Empire of Shame, were released and seen by many people; CEO of Samsung Electronics made an official statement of apology on the workers’ illnesses for the first time, even though the contents was not enough; and Samsung came out of its castle for the negotiation.

On the other hand, we also have confronted lots of challenges. The great victory of Mr. Hwang Sang-ki, the father of Yu-mi, to get the workers’ compensation, took more than seven years. The whole experiences were just series of systematic problems against workers’ right; the governmental investigation is not transparent nor comprehensive; the company can conceal or distort the information which is critically important to prove the association between the illness and workplace; even worse, the company repeatedly tries to bribe the victims to prevent the legal recognition of occupational diseases from its factory; and the government keeps refusing to compensate the victims. All of them should be stopped and changed for the right and dignity of the occupational victims.

The negotiation between SHARPS and Samsung has been more than one year. Only recently Samsung showed its proposal on the three agendas of the negotiation - apology, preventive measures, and compensation. Disappointingly it does not show any sincerity to address the problem. Samsung argues its empty announcement was enough for apology, which never accept its responsibility. And it refuses to guarantee the essential elements for the future protection of workers' health - the right to know and the right to participate of the workers and the civil society. Samsung’s proposal on compensation cannot cover even 10 percent of the alleged victims because of many hurdles that most of the victims cannot clear. It excludes even the subcontract workers who have taken the most dangerous job in its factories.

On 31st Oct, more than ten thousands fishes in the Woncheonri River were killed due to the water pollution of Samsung electronics in Suwon. The government announced officially that the cause of death was the incidental increase of sodium hypochlorite, and accused a subcontractor of Samsung of mistake in operating the facilities. However, the local environmental groups revealed totally different fact; they found highly toxic chemicals such as cyanide and chloroform in the polluted water sample. That is why the local groups have demanded the transparent investigation and prevention. But Samsung has denied any responsibility and just tried to cover up the issue as soon as possible with ignoring the local community.

SK Hynix, the second biggest company in semiconductor industry of Korea, launched an “independent advisory committee” last October. SHARPS have been organizing occupational victims from its factory and got the legal compensation for the leukaemia victim from its affiliate company, Magnachip, on 2012. SK Hynix announced that the committee consisting of seven experts, two representatives of the company, and two representatives of the labour union, would investigate the OSH condition of its facilities for the
next one year and make a guide for compensation as well as prevention measures to address the health problems of its workers. This is quite different approach from Samsung. We will watch it till the final step.

On December 9th, Newstapa, an independent progressive media in Korea, compared the disclosure of chemical information of Samsung Electronics in Korea and Texas, USA, based on what SHARPS had experienced. The State government of Texas provided the information of chemicals used or stored in Samsung Electronics factory at Austin from 2005 to 2012. By contrast, Korean government did not provide full contents of its inspection report on the OSH in Samsung. Korean government explained that information was the trade secret of Samsung. But is the information on whether the personal protective equipment were provided to the workers can be the trade secret? Should the number of injuries for the last three years be protected as a trade secret? It just showed the disgusting fact that Korean government protects Samsung, not right to know of people. (You can see the video clip of this news at http://newstapa.org/22523).

To tackle this situation, SHARPS launched the campaign for right-to-know on last October. The key slogan is “Right-to-know is the Way-to-Survive” based on our own experience and understanding that occupational diseases can be prevented only when the rights of workers are guaranteed sufficiently. Our goal is to raise awareness on the importance of this right, and to organize social power to make the right-to-know legislation. (You can see a video clips on how important the right-to-know is at http://youtu.be/c7bvW9Bukhk, and a music video on our campaign song at http://tvpot.daum.net/v/vfcbdugg8OShICg5ilICLxC)

OSHE Foundation

OSHE Workplace Accident Survey Report - 128 workers died (Formal Sector – 43 and Informal Sector - 85) and 108 workers were injured (Formal Sector - 76 and Informal Sector - 32) in different workplace accidents from July 01 to September 30, 2014.

Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) has revealed this quarterly workplace accident report based on monitoring 18 leading national daily newspapers of the country and reports of its field offices in different parts of the country.

As per the findings, in formal sector, the highest number of workers’ casualties (Died - 06 and Injured - 31) took place in Garments (sweater, waving, knitting, spinning and composing) industries and the second highest number of workers’ casualties (Died - 20 and Injured - 04) took place in Construction sector. Moreover, the ship breaking sector brought about 04 deaths and 10 injuries. In informal sector, the highest number of workers’ casualties (Died - 28 and Injured - 09) took place in Agriculture sector while the second highest number of workers’ casualties (Died - 24 and Injured - 06) was seen in Construction (Household related; personally) sector. The major causes, found for these deaths and injuries are electrocution, thunderstorm/lighting, factory fire, falling from height or ship and boiler or water pipe explosion. Electrocuton killed 46 workers and injured 09. Thunderstorm/lighting caused death of 26 and injury of 05 workers. Factory fire caused 29 injuries. Falling from height/ship caused 17 deaths while Boiler or water pipe explosion brought about 16 injuries.

Work Improvement and Occupational Safety & Health Training Programs at Small Construction Enterprises

Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment (OSHE) Foundation organized training programs at 50 small construction enterprises in October and November on Work Improvement and Occupational Safety & Health with the financial assistance from the ILO, “Way out of Informality” Project in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi.
In these training programs, 540 construction workers from 50 enterprises and also management level people participated. The ways of work improvement and occupational safety & health issues at small enterprises were discussed based on ILO ‘WISCON’ model in the participatory training programs.

Study Circle on Occupational Safety & Health for Ship Breaking Workers

The three Study Circles on Occupational Safety and Health were held on September 05, 19 & 26 and October 31, 2014 at OSHE Training and Welfare Centre Vatiary, Sitakunda, Chittagong. A total of 60 ship breaking workers from different yards participated in these study circles. Mr. K.M Shahidullah, General Secretary, BFTUC, TUC’s Mr. Dilip Kumar Nath and JSL’s Mr. Abdur Rahim Master & Mr. Kamal Uddin Saheb were present as key discussants of these study circles.

In their presentation, they discussed OSH provisions as per Bangladesh Labour Act 2006, such as issuing appointment letter, issuing identity card, fixing working hours, provision for leave, keeping favourable 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 equipment’s etc.

Health Camps for Ship Breaking Workers

OSHE organized 07 in-door camps on September 05, 12 & 26 and October 03, 24 & 31, 2014 at OSHE Training and Welfare Centre Vatiary, Sitakunda, Chittagong and 08 out-door camps on September 01, 03, 08, 15, 17 & 29 and October 01 and 29, 2014 at Kadamrasul Government Primary School, Baroaulia Government Primary School, Madambibirhat and Kumira Government Primary School.

Tazreen Fashions Fire Accident Victim Network made Demonstration in front of Walmart Bangladesh Office for due Compensation

On the occasion of 2nd anniversary of the Tazreen Fashions Fire Accident, the leaders and members of Tazreen Fashions Fire Accident Victim Network made a demonstration at 12pm noon today (24 Nov. 2014) in front of Walmart Country office in Gulshan, Dhaka, Bangladesh with 4 points key demands.

On 24 November, 2012, a group of 112 workers lost lives and around 300 workers were injured in a devastating fire at Tazreen Fashions Limited, a sister concern of Tuba Group at Nischintapur, Ashulia, Savar in Dhaka due to intentional workplace safety negligence of the factory management; workers at the factory on accident producing garments products for the Walmart.

After the demonstration, leaders of Tazreen Fashions Fire Accident Victim Network wanted to meet with head of the Walmart office in Dhaka with aim to hand over a 4 points demand letter to the Walmart authority, but, Walmart Dhaka office refused to meet with them and not received the memorandum.

Jorina Begum, President of the Network letter on publicly read out the demands to Walmart and said “Injured workers and family members of death workers of Tazreen Fashions again shocked with the behaviour of Walmart Dhaka office today. Tazreen Fashions Fire Accident Victims will keep continue its fight for due compensation from Walmart. We are calling our brothers and sisters around the world express due solidarity with the struggle of Tazreen Fashions Fire Accident Victim Network in Bangladesh and put pressure over the Walmart Authority to fulfill our demands immediately”. Read More
Cividep

Occupational Health for Electronics Sector Workers in Sriperumbudur, India

Following the Health Check-up camp conducted for Electronics Workers in September, 21 workers were sent for follow-up checks (mostly ENT) to the Employees State Insurance (ESI) hospital in Chennai. Three Foxconn workers were diagnosed with mild hearing loss by the ESI doctor. Two workers were diagnosed with shadow vision and had to go for further tests. One worker was diagnosed with double vision and was advised to wear lenses.

A final consultation is planned for the purpose of informing workers about their final diagnosis, how they can improve their health and safety at work, and how they can file a complaint before the Factory Inspector to demand compensation for occupational hearing loss and other occupational diseases and ailments.

OHS Training Workshop cum Health Hazards Mapping Exercise for Workers in the Export Oriented Garment Manufacturing Sector, Bangalore

A training session on occupational health and safety in garment factories in Bangalore was conducted jointly by Cividep and GLU on 28th December 2014. The session was supported by Developing World Outreach Initiative (DWOI), which is an undertaking of the Northern California Section of the American Industrial Hygiene Association and the Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network (MHSSN).

This programme was conducted for women workers in garment manufacturing factories in Bangalore which export to global brands. Some of the occupational health concerns that were intended to be mapped or addressed through this programme for women garment workers include excessive white discharge, tuberculosis, bronchial infections, respiratory problems, backaches and varicose veins.

The training sought to make workers aware of the health and safety risks they are exposed to in their work, help them understand the manifestations of health problems attributed to work and to know what better health and safety conditions at work should be like, and lastly, to understand the obligation of the employer towards occupational health and safety.

The introductory session was conducted by Antony Raju of Cividep India. This was followed by a session on health and ergonomics problems attributed to the work, which was conducted by Dr. Nithyananda of ESI. Some of the occupational health and ergonomic problems included excessive discharge, irregular monthly menstrual cycle, eyestrain, body aches, tingling sensation, numbness, weakness and pain during after work.

Afterwards, Antony of Cividep conducted a mapping exercise to capture health and safety hazards in the garment sector, including sexual harassment. These hazards are various and may arise when using dyes and chemicals on cloth, while using formaldehyde to smoothen cloth and make it less likely to wrinkle or crease, while dealing with fire resistant chemicals and antibacterial treatments, poor ventilation, standing for long hours, poor light, stressful environment, etc. These can irritate the skin, cause breathing difficulties and even cancer or harm to the reproductive system. Hazards are also posed during the cutting of fabric, from working in dusty factories where breathing problems and byssinosis or brown lung disease occur from breathing in cotton dust, during sewing due to machine injury and overstrain, as well as during the finishing process for garments, where acid-washing and sand-blasting threaten workers’ health and safety. Bleaches used in acid-washing burn skin and cause skin, nose and throat irritations, as well as liver and kidney problems or even cancer. During sandblasting, workers are exposed to silica dust and become susceptible to silicosis, which can lead to lung cancer and increased chances of contracting tuberculosis.
Dr Narayan B.H of ESI spoke on common chest ailments in garment factories, protective gear and equipment, and grievance mechanisms for dealing with occupational health and safety in the garments sector.

The training session was concluded with laws and grievance mechanisms available to address occupational health issues in the workplace. Inputs were given by Rukmini, President of Garment Labour Union (GLU), Bangalore and Dr. Nithyananda. These include

1. Health and Safety and Anti Sexual Harassment Committees in the factories
2. Sections on health and safety in the Factories Act
3. ESI scheme has certain provisions to address health and safety issues

For grievance redressal, the factory level committees can be approached. Besides, the factories inspectorate and ESI regional offices can be approached. GLU and Dr. Nithyananda promised support to the workers, and they were informed that as a follow up, medical checkups would be conducted to identify and treat (including obtaining compensation) occupational illnesses. The services of ESIC and Rajiv Gandhi Chest Institute, Bangalore will be utilized.

10^th anniversary of Japanese network of asbestos victims

10th anniversary event of the Japan Association of Mesothelioma, Asbestos-related Disease Victims and Their Families was observed on October 4th, 2014 in Tokyo, Japan.

This association started with 3 branches and some tens of members in 2004 and now has 14 branches with more than 500 members.

This year, 4 participants from Korean National Network of Asbestos Victims (1 meso victim, 2 family members of a deceased meso victim and one more) and 2 participants from Indonesia (1 asbestosis victim and 1 Ina-BAN) attended the event.

The event was really heart-warming with a gathering of more than 200 asbestos victims and their families from all over the country.

Indonesian Asbestos Related Disease Workshop (LION)

On December 8-10, 2014, the Ministry of Health (MOH) of the Republic of Indonesia in collaboration with the Korean Environment Corporation (KECO) conducted a three-day workshop entitled: “Seoul Initiative Indonesia Workshop: Improving Health Officers’ Competencies on Measuring Workplace Environmental Ambient Level and Diagnosing Asbestos Related Diseases in Indonesia.” The first day and a half of the workshop took place in a meeting room at Wisma Makara Universitas
Indonesia, in the Depok area of Jakarta. After lunch on December 9, delegates visited the Persahabatan Hospital (RSUP Persahabatan).

The objective of the workshop training sessions was to improve the knowledge of MOH health officers regarding the diagnosing of asbestos-related diseases and undertaking workplace environmental monitoring. Beside the health officers, the MOH invited other stakeholders on asbestos issues to the workshop including: representatives of the WHO, Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Environment, and NGOS; participants from hospitals, OSH Lab, Occupational Health Clinic, Health Professional Organization, OH Doctors’ Association, OSH National Board, Social Security Agency (BPJS), and FICMA (Fibers and Cement Manufacturers Association); and academics, researchers and experts.

On the opening of the workshop, Dr Muchtarudin Mansyur, the Director of Occupational Health and Sport, at the Ministry of Health, discussed current asbestos issues in Indonesia. He stated that there were three possible reasons why Indonesia still had no confirmed asbestos cases or data on asbestos-related diseases. The first explanation was that chrysotile asbestos was not harmful to health; the second was that Indonesians had a genetic immunity to these diseases; and the third was that our physicians did not have the knowledge required to diagnose asbestos-related diseases (ARDs). To improve the knowledge base, the MOH decided to work on an asbestos health program with the KECO.
At a meeting on September 30th in Hanoi for planning activities for ban of asbestos in Vietnam, it was agreed to establish the Vietnam Ban Asbestos Network (Vn-BAN).

**Occupational Health and Safety Training of Trainers for Electronics Workers**

AMRC, ANROEV, ICRT along with CDI organized a training for Occupational Health and safety for Electronics Workers in November in Vietnam. The training is a part of long term intervention in the region at all levels namely – action research, participatory training and education, campaign and advocacy.

The objectives of the Workshop were:

1. to empower the trade union activists so that they can identify the potential hazards including chemical use and occupational health issues at electronics factories
2. unions and worker organisations will be better informed about OSH issues and will bargain for working environments that are safe and hazard free
3. to improve training skills for a core group of local trainers so that they can conduct follow-up training and disseminate knowledge to prevent hazards for other workers
4. To develop a long term plan to eliminate the hazards in electronic factories in Vietnam, identify victims and help them in their self-organising and linking with ANROEV.

The training started off with an introduction of the participants and the work they did. Many of the participants were OSH representatives at their workplaces and others were from the trade union.

They had a basic knowledge on the subject and were inquisitive wanting to gain as much of an understanding of the subject in the available time. This made the training full of energy and very productive.

The training of trainers (ToT) had 19 men and 15 women and the remaining were the trainers, local support staff totaling up to 41 people. AMRC and ICRT were the trainers with the focus on addressing the chemicals in the electronics industry with their experiences in Asia and the Silicon Valley along with CDI who provided the input about Vietnam.

The training began with the hazard mapping exercise to help the trainers map their workplaces and to identify problem areas. The next section was on chemicals, impact on the body and what would be the hierarchies of control principles that will be carried out to address the problem. There were then introduced to tools like ChemHat where they can look for the effects of the chemicals and look for safer substitutes. There was a session on the reproductive hazards of chemicals on women and men by sharing what had happened to workers in the US while working in the electronics industry in Silicon Valley in the 1970-80’s.
On the second day, there was a sharing more on cases and why factors like dosage, duration, intensity and exposure ratio is very important in understanding the irreversible damage it can do to the human body. Following this there were sessions on ergonomics, noise and stress as they were identified by most of the participants as hazards that they encounter on a daily basis at their workplace. Following this by applying the hierarchy of control, different steps can be taken to eliminate the hazards.

The final session was when participants were divided into groups again and worked on concrete steps that they will take in their action plan to address the hazardous chemicals and workplace problems that they face. Some of the actions outlined were as follows:

- investigate all of the chemicals we are exposed to and learn about their hazards
- use Chemhat to do hazard profiles of the chemicals in our factories
- encourage the search for safer substitutes

This workplan will run to June 2015. Following this AMRC and ICRT will go back to Vietnam to do a follow-up on this training and in addressing the needs of these trainers.

**IBAS**

During the final quarter of 2014, the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat was represented at two of the year’s most high-profile asbestos meetings. In an address to the plenary session of the International Mesothelioma Interest Group on October 22, 2014 in Cape Town, South Africa, IBAS Coordinator Laurie Kazan-Allen considered the Global Asbestos Landscape 2014. In her talk, she analysed the latest global asbestos trade data and highlighted the continuing increase of asbestos use throughout Asia.

In November, the IBAS Coordinator was one of three international keynote speakers at the first international asbestos conference held in Australia by the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency. The paper she presented to the plenary session on November 17 was entitled: Campaigning for Justice: On the Asbestos Frontline 2014. During her talk, she screened a new WHO film entitled: Victims of Chrysotile Asbestos – Voices from Southeast Asia and discussed ground-breaking ban asbestos initiatives taking place throughout the Asian region.

**ICRT-GoodElectronics Network host Successful network meeting on the use of chemicals**

From 18 to 21 January, the GoodElectronics Network, the International Campaign for Responsible Technology and their allies had a network meeting in San Francisco about the responsible use of chemicals in the global electronics industry. A big thank you goes out to all participants. In the next newsletter, we will share more information about the results.
NIOSH Releases Noise Measurement Database

NIOSH recently released a database of noise measurement results collected by agency investigators during health hazard evaluation (HHE) surveys conducted from 1996–2012. The new database includes more than 760 personal noise exposure measurements and more than 530 area noise measurements from 73 different HHE reports. It also includes information on the type of dosimeter or sound level meter used; whether a hearing conservation program was in place; the type and duration of noise measurement; exposure to ototoxic chemicals; and more.

HHEs are requested by employees, their representatives, or employers to help learn whether health hazards are present in a workplace. The scope of HHEs varies based on the requestors’ concerns and the professional judgment of NIOSH staff.

Access the database using the NIOSH website.

The database is available via the NIOSH Data and Statistics Gateway, a Web resource that the agency launched last year to provide centralized access to NIOSH-generated data, including public-use research datasets, surveillance data, statistics, and other collections of data related to occupational safety and health.

The haunting poetry of a Chinese factory worker who committed suicide

On the last day of September, a 24-year-old migrant worker in the southern Chinese city of Shenzhen killed himself. Xu Lizhi jumped out of a window of a residential dormitory run by his employer, Foxconn, the huge electronics manufacturing company with a million-strong workforce that makes the majority of the world's Apple iPhones.

In most cases, Xu's suicide would have been yet another footnote in the vast, sweeping story of China’s economic boom and transformation. He is one of a legion of young Chinese migrants who emerge out of rural obscurity to find work in China’s teeming cities, only to end up crushed by both the dullness and stress of factory jobs, insufficient wages and a steady accumulation of personal disappointments.

But Xu was a poet. And, after his death, his friends collected his work and got some published in a local Shenzhen newspaper.

The poems, translated at the leftist website Libcom.org, are a wrenching echo of the alienation and hardship felt by countless people in modern China and, for that matter, in other parts of the developing world. They lament the grinding ennui of the assembly line, the squalor of a migrant worker's narrow, frustrated existence.

Xu wrote of his "Rented Room" in 2013: "Every time I open the window or the wicker gate/I seem like a dead man/Slowly pushing open the lid of a coffin."

Shenzhen, on the other side of the border between Hong Kong and the mainland, is a sprawling metropolis of 13 million. A few decades ago, it was a sleepy fishing village. Now, a visitor stumbles into a surreal landscape of gleaming skyscrapers, gated communities, and bustling malls. It's a giddy embodiment of China's own rise.

But it takes a toll on those who get swallowed up by it. The London Review Books cites this poem by
Xu, which is a play on another verse by the famous Chinese poet Gu Cheng:

We ran along the railway, arriving in some place called ‘the City’ where we trade in our youth, and our muscle. Finally we have nothing to trade, only a cough and a skeleton nobody cares about. ‘Sleepless’ Midnight. Everyone is sleeping soundly, we keep our pair of young wounds open. These black eyes, can you really lead us to the light?

By Ishaan Tharoor November 12, 2014, Read More

Silicosis swallows mine workers in Rajasthan

Karauli (Rajasthan): For 10 years, Ghanshyam underwent treatment for tuberculosis (TB) as his persistent coughing and chest pain refused to go away. But in 2011, the stone quarry worker was told that he is in the last stages of silicosis - an insidious and incurable lung disease that has claimed the lives of many mine workers across Rajasthan.

Twenty-five years of working in the sandstone mines of Karauli district in Rajasthan and inhaling the silica dust have reduced Ghanshyam, 50, to a skeleton. On a liquid diet for the past many months, the father of two cannot stand and always moans in pain.

"There is no hope for us now. We are in debt as around Rs.4 lakh has been spent on his treatment. Had he been diagnosed with silicosis on time, life wouldn’t have come to this," Dayabai, Ghanshyam’s wife, told a visiting IANS correspondent. Dayabai has come to terms with the reality that she will lose him any time.

Karauli is one of the 19 districts in Rajasthan where thousands of mine workers are battling with silicosis caused by inhaling dust containing crystalline silica.

Ghanshyam is not the only botched-up case of misdiagnosis in Aarampur village of Karauli in the eastern belt of Rajasthan where sandstone is found in abundance and has been used in building the historical Red Fort and the palatial Rashtrapati Bhavan.

"Many silicosis-affected patients in this village, in fact in several adjoining districts, have died mistakenly thinking they had TB," Vikas Bhardwaj, secretary at Dang Vikas Sansthan - a non-government organization - told IANS. Read More

WHO European Environment and Health Ministerial Board

Tackling air pollution, climate change and chemicals requires political action in the European Region according to members of the WHO European Environment and Health Ministerial Board (EHMB). The EHMB brings together four ministers of health, four ministers of environment and four representatives of intergovernmental organisations. At the fifth meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania on 1 July 2014, EHMB members committed themselves to taking concrete action in the near future to address these priority issues, as outlined below:

- Place the elimination of diseases from asbestos exposure and the implementation of the new Minamata Convention on Mercury at the core of negotiations with European countries, in line with European Member States’ commitment in 2010 to eliminate asbestos-related diseases by 2015;
- Support the adoption of a global resolution on air quality, initiated by France, Norway and other countries, in 2015; and

EHMB members also considered stronger collaboration with partners e.g. working with the EU and its agencies is of high strategic importance to perform these tasks. In particular, they agreed to establish solid collaboration with the EU Commission, European Parliament and the countries holding the EU presidency in 2015–2017.

In addition, they laid out a plan of action to strengthen links between multilateral environmental agreements relevant to the implementation of the commitments made at the Fifth Ministerial Conference on Environment and Health, held in Parma, Italy in 2010. Plans for the Sixth Conference are being developed and the
EHMB provided guidance during its meeting on identifying the main themes of the meeting including air pollution, climate change and chemicals.

Four EHMB members were elected at the meeting in Vilnius, including the health ministers of Croatia, Georgia, Lithuania and Spain. Dr Vytenis Povilas Andriukaitis, Minister of Health of Lithuania, and Mr Amir Peretz, Minister of Environmental Protection of Israel, were elected co-chairs. Croatia and Ukraine each offered to host a meeting to support the European environment and health process in 2015 and 2016.

EHMB’s sixth meeting will take place in February 2015 in Madrid, Spain.

Originally posted on 24 July 2014 Read More

Progress on Asbestos Ban in Nepal!

On December 22, 2014, the Government of Nepal banned the import, sale, distribution and use of all asbestos and asbestos-containing materials on the grounds of public health. According to a government notice published in the Nepal Gazette by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Environment, the prohibition will take effect on June 20, 2015, 181 days from the date of publication; the sole exemption is for automotive brake shoes and clutch plates. These prohibitions will drastically reduce national consumption as the vast majority of asbestos used in Nepal goes into construction materials such as roofing sheets. Commenting on the ban, Jaya Ram Lamichhane, former President of the Federation of Contractors’ Association (Nepal), confirmed that: “Asbestos is largely used in roofing in Nepal and is mostly used in traditional buildings.” Asbestos roofing is popular in regions such as Terai and was extensively used in the capital city, Kathmandu.

Welcoming Nepal’s new policy on asbestos Ram Charitra Sah, Executive Director of the non-governmental organization The Centre for Public Health and Environmental Development (CEPHED), urged “the government to effectively implement the health and environment-friendly decision.” Mr. Sah highlighted the health hazard caused by the dumping of asbestos waste saying: “The only reliable source of drinking water for Nepalese citizens is the ground water which is likely to be contaminated by the haphazard dumping of asbestos waste.” Since 2012, the CEPHED has been actively working to raise awareness in Nepal of the asbestos hazard and has documented widespread use and dumping of contaminated products.

Having recognized the “praiseworthy, timely and visionary [action]” taken by the Government, the CEPHED also urged that measures be adopted to: locate and quantify asbestos-containing products in the built environment; raise public awareness of the health consequences of asbestos exposures; implement an environmentally sound policy for the management of asbestos waste.

by Laurie Kazan-Allen, Read More

Flour main cause of occupational asthma: Study

German researchers have identified flour as the main cause of occupational asthma, closely followed by cleaning products.

The research, the largest of its kind to be undertaken in France, aimed to understand who was most affected by the condition and what the main causes were.

A team from University Hospital Strasbourg collected data over a three year period from a network of respiratory doctors specialising in occupational diseases.

"Flour was identified as the main cause - seen in 20 percent of cases - closely followed by ammonium compounds often found in cleaning products - seen in 15 percent of cases,” explained lead study author and professor Frederic De Blay from the University Hospital Strasbourg.

Women were more likely to be diagnosed with occupational asthma compared with men. Read More

Asbestos mining: NGT raps MoEF for vague response

Perturbed by illegal and unscientific asbestos mining across the country, the National Green Tribunal today pulled up the Environment Ministry (MoEF) for providing a "vague and uncertain" response.

A bench, headed by NGT Chairperson Justice Swatanter Kumar, made the observation after going through an affidavit filed by the Ministry of
Environment and Forests (MoEF) and fixed the matter for further consideration on December 23.

"None of the affidavits is specific as to what steps have been taken by the Ministry of Environment and Forests or any other authority of the State to answer a question as to whether any asbestos mining was being carried on in any part of the State or not. Affidavit filed by the MoEF is vague and uncertain.

"It is undisputable that asbestos mining activity is considered hazardous and causes serious environmental and health hazard including dangerous diseases like cancer etc. We are constrained to observe that concerned Ministry and appropriate authorities of the state are expected to exercise their power to prevent and control degradation of environment and harm to public health," the bench said.

The Tribunal also directed C S Thakur, MoEF Under Secretary, to be present and produce complete records in relation to asbestos mining.

"He is also directed to obtain complete data on physical inspection from all the states i.e. Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Odisha, Telengana, Jharkhand and Karnataka. This data should be collected from the concerned state governments, mining departments and respective Pollution Control Boards and Pollution Control Committees," the bench added.

The Tribunal was hearing pleas by NGO Environics Trust and Amar Singh seeking directions to appropriate authorities to immediately stop all asbestos mining operations in the country and ensure their scientific closure.

It has also sought a direction to Indian Bureau of Mines, Department of Mines and Geology and State Pollution Control Boards of different states to restore and reclaim abandoned mining in Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha.

Press Trust of India, Nov 21, 2014, Read More

Your car has been built on an assembly line of broken fingers

Accidents that crush limbs are taking place at an alarming rate in the automobile industry in Haryana. Twenty cases show up daily in a single hospital.

"I’m lucky," said Lokesh Kumar as he held up his left hand for examination. “I pulled out in time.”

Half a centimetre of his thumb had been shaved off by a machine.

Kumar works in Manesar, India’s leading automobile hub, about 50 km from Delhi, in Haryana’s Gurgaon district. Around 80,000 workers work here at more than 600 companies, with a majority producing components for cars and bikes.

Last week over morning tea, as night-shift workers emerged bleary-eyed, and day-shift workers trooped in with their tiffin-boxes, the young man in his twenties told me stories of the scores of accidents he had seen in the years since he arrived from his village in Bihar.

“In every factory, you would find at least ten boys with broken fingers,” he said. “About half of the boys who’ve come from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar to work in Haryana have lost their fingers.”

This sounded hyperbolic until I visited the hospital for workers run by the central government’s Employee’s State Insurance Corporation. Five patients sat in the orthopaedic department waiting for a doctor’s consultation. Four of them were cases of “crush injuries”.

“We see about 20 cases of crush injuries every day,” said Dr Pankaj Bansal, the orthopaedic surgeon at the hospital. “In most cases, the fingers are auto-amputated, which means they have been lost even before the worker has come to us. In some cases, the entire hand is lost.”

Not just the orthopaedic department, even the emergency ward in the hospital sees a steady stream of crush injuries, which are also called cut injuries. The records examined by Scroll showed 20 cases in the ten days between November 19-28.

By Supriya Sharma

Groups Accuse Apple Supplier in China of Labor Violations

HONG KONG — With its stock near a high and its latest iPhone expected to be introduced on Tuesday, Apple is facing new accusations of violations of labor rights and workplace safety at a supplier in China.

The allegations involve employees at a factory in the eastern China city of Suqian that is owned by
Catcher Technology, a Taiwan company, and that makes metal casings for Apple iPads and for other consumer electronics companies.

The employees are made to work excessive overtime and handle toxic chemicals without proper protective clothing, according to a report released Thursday by Green America, an environmental non-profit group, and China Labor Watch, a workers’ rights group based in New York.

Apple, like Samsung and several other multinational companies, has previously faced scrutiny over the working conditions at the factories in China where its products are made. But the allegations in the latest report suggest that the company might need to increase its vigilance further over the 200 major global suppliers that account for 97 percent of Apple’s component costs.

In a statement on Thursday, Apple said its most recent annual audit of the Suqian plant, in May, had “found some concrete areas for improvement in Catcher’s operations, and we worked with Catcher to develop a corrective action plan.”

Apple had scheduled a follow-up visit to the plant for next month but dispatched a team immediately to investigate the allegations in the new report, Chris Gaither, an Apple spokesman, said in a statement on Thursday.

By NEIL GOUGH and BRIAN X. CHEN
SEP. 4, 2014

BWI supports Ban Asbestos Campaign in Pakistan

“Asbestos kills, it is a danger to the workers, their families and the communities but yet it is still being produced and used in the production of building materials and other products. There are durable and safe non-Asbestos alternatives available, therefore the use of Asbestos should stop.” Yuson further informed: “Many countries have banned asbestos, and the BWI will continue its vigilance along with the trade union movement, NGOs and allies to build a global campaign calling for worldwide ban on asbestos, compensation for the victims and education and training for the workers in the removal of asbestos from buildings, ships and other products.”

Earlier, in his opening address, ACEEU President and BWI Asia-Pacific Regional Committee Member Ishtiaq Virk stated: “The global misery Asbestos usage has brought to countries is well known. Trade unions, medical professional, environmentalists, lawyers and civil society should work together to educate workers and the public at large about the dangers of asbestos and should work towards a ban on Asbestos in Pakistan.”

Several speakers addressed the Conference on wide ranging issues. A detailed presentation from Sugio Furuya, Coordinator of the Asian Ban Asbestos Network (ABAN) was also made capturing the global consumption trend, initiatives for country bans, particularly in the Asia Pacific region.

The Conference concluded on a high note with the adoption of a joint trade union declaration calling for a ban on Asbestos in Pakistan.

The Conference was attended by 110 participants, including trade unions, Medical professionals, Doctors, Environmentalists, Lawyers and members of the Civil Society.

Asbestos victims win landmark legal battle as state faulted for poor ventilation

In a landmark ruling, the Supreme Court said Thursday the government acted illegally in failing to mandate ventilation to protect workers at asbestos mills, holding the state liable for ¥330 million in compensation.

It is the first time the top court has indicted the state for asbestos-linked health problems. The ruling is likely to influence similar lawsuits in the future.

It also ends an eight-year struggle for justice by several dozen sufferers from Osaka Prefecture who uncovered divisions between different layers of the judiciary in assessing the state’s culpability.

The government’s failure to mandate the installation of air ventilation in places where laborers handled asbestos was “extremely
unreasonable” and “illegal,” said Presiding Justice Yu Shiraki.

Outside the court, plaintiffs and their supporters erupted in joy when they heard the news.

“This is a huge step forward,” one man said through a megaphone. “I’m sure this will give ammunition to future anti-asbestos movements like ours.” The court rejected an appeal by the state against an earlier high court ruling that upheld the plaintiffs’ cause.

Thursday’s ruling was handed down in a combined response to two litigations filed by 89 former plant workers and their families in the city of Sennan, Osaka Prefecture, who say they suffered lung cancer and other maladies linked to asbestos inhalation.

The court held Thursday that 54 of the plaintiffs were eligible for redress, but more are expected to be compensated in the future.

BY Tomohiro Osaki

Occupational Health in the Jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights: Brincat v. Malta

This guest blog post was written by Elena Sychenko, Ph.D. student at the University of Catania, Law Faculty, Labour Law Department.

On 24 July, the European Court of Human Rights announced its judgment in Brincat and Others v. Malta (the Brincat case). This case was the result of 21 applications of former workers of the public ship repair yard exposed to asbestos. The Government of Malta was held responsible for breaching its positive obligations to protect the rights to life and the right to respect for private life. A violation of the right to life was found where the death of the employee was the result of exposure to asbestos. Where employees had suffered from different diseases, the Court found a violation of the right to respect for private and family life.

Brincat is a landmark case for Occupational Health in all the countries of the Council of Europe. For the first time, the Court found violations of two rights deduced from articles 2 and 8 that are fundamental to this sphere: the right to access information concerning risks the employee is exposed to and the right to protection from dangerous industrial activities. The reasoning of the Court in this case is particularly interesting. Compared to other “occupational health” cases, even if there have not been many of them, the Court develops the content of the positive obligation of protection from dangerous activities and of the positive obligation to provide information about risks. It also uses a very curious reasoning in finding whether the Government of Malta knew or ought to have known about the danger of asbestos.

We’ll say more about this development and illustrate the concretization of the Court’s approach to matters that are closely connected to Occupational Health.

The scope of the positive obligation to protect from dangerous activities

Already in 1994, in the case of Lopez Ostra v. Spain, which concerned severe environmental pollution, the Court interpreted article 8 as including the right to protection from dangerous activities. The scope of the corresponding positive obligation of the States was developed in Öneryıldız v. Turkey, which concerned the death of 9 relatives of the applicant, as a result of methane explosion. In this decision, the Court stated that where dangerous activities are concerned “special emphasis must be placed on regulations geared to the special features of the activity in question, particularly with regard to the level of the potential risk to human lives. They must govern the licensing, setting up, operation, security and supervision of the activity and must make it compulsory for all those concerned to take practical measures to ensure the effective protection of citizens whose lives might be endangered by the inherent risks.” Read More

Publication online of the Proceedings of Paris conference (Oct. 2012)

International Day of Asbestos Victims: State of Science -- State of the World

The proceedings of the symposium «international day of asbestos victims» organised in Paris, 12th October 2012 by the French National Association for the Defense of Asbestos Victims -- ANDEVA are now available online. To read and/or download the individual papers or the whole book go to the
Andeva website and click on the links on the left column:

http://www.andeva.fr/
or alternatively go directly to
http://www.andeva.fr/?Les-actes-du-colloque-
Journee
http://www.andeva.fr/?Proceedings-of-the-
symposium

The proceedings are built in two parts.
The first part « state of science » includes texts on
the history and state of epidemiology of asbestos
diseases by R. Lemen, on the epidemiology of
asbestos-related diseases in Italy by E. Merler, in
Québec, Canada, by F. Turcotte and in Brazil by
H. Castro, followed by texts on medicine and
fundamental research by A. Scherpereel, P-G. Betta
and M-C. Jaurand.

The second part «state of the world» displays a
global panorama of the situation with respect to
the use and exposure to asbestos, the different
legislations, situation and compensation of victims,
struggles and actions for public health:
economic and geographical data about asbestos
trade (L. Kazan-Allen), the historical responsibility
of Canada (P. Martin and K. Ruff), the situation in
United States (L. Reinstein), the two judgements
with international repercussions on banning
asbestos, that is, the cancellation in 1991 of the
EPA regulations in United States (L. Kazan-Allen)
and the rejection of the complaint of Canada to
WTO against France in 2000 (M. Parigot), the
contrasting situations of India (M. Gupta), Japan
and Korea, with an overview of the tragic situation
in Asia, notably in China (S. Furuya and Y. Choi),
also in Brazil (F. Giannasi) and Australia (L. Singh),
the issue of compensation is described in the
context of South Africa (T. da Cruz), France (M-
J. Voisin) and the Netherlands (T. de Bruin), the
current European situations in Belgium (E. Jonckheere), Germany (G. Albracht) and Albany
(R. Hanxari), finally the global impact of the Eternit
trial in Italy (B. Pesce) and an overview of the
general situation in France and throughout the
world (M. Hindry and P. Pluta).

This book has a double purpose: to increase
diffusion of scientific knowledge and to develop an
international public health movement; it

should help to provide better awareness of the
risks and damages due to asbestos and stimulate
better public health policies to fight this plague at
regional, national, European and worldwide level.

South Asian Meeting on Social Protection held in Dhaka -
Marginalised Workers in South Asia demand for Transformative Social Protection

The Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health, and
Environment Foundation (OSHE), the Hong-Kong
based Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC), and
the South Asian partners of the Asian Roundtable
on Social Protection (AROSP) co-organised a
meeting of grassroots workers organisations from
different South Asian countries on the issue of
social protection.

The programme was held on 18-19 December 2014
in BRAC Inn Centre, Dhaka, Bangladesh with
participation of 41 representatives from 30
government workers organisations at informal
economy, trade unions and labour NGOs in
Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.
The meeting aims to deepen the understanding of
the marginalised workers in the region on social
protection issues and to formulate common social
protection demands that South Asian marginalised
workers can jointly campaign for at the sub-
regional level.

AROSP deems that the deepening inequality and
the swelling informal economy in South Asia are
very alarming. About 31 per cent of the total South
Asian population are living at less than USD1.25 per
day. The majority of the workers in South Asia,
especially the women, have been marginalised in
the society due to the dispossession of rights,
livelihood, and common goods.
This is very apparent in the case of a victim of the Tazreen fire incident two years ago. Jorina Begum, Coordinator of the Tajreen Fashions Fire Accident Victims Network shared, “I feel bad that my life has changed since the Tazreen fire. Before the incident, I am the one who takes care of my family. Now, I do not have any means to support them. I get loans from my neighbours but I feel so ashamed in doing so. My neighbours scold me because I cannot pay my loan.”

Aggravating the difficulties of the marginalised informal workers are the absence of social protection and the increasing job and income insecurity. Like the case of the Tazreen fire victim, most marginalised workers in other parts of South Asia do not have safety nets when they lose their jobs and source of income. Anandini Padhi, a grassroots organiser for over 25 years from Orissa, India, asserts that, “Workers in the agricultural sector, forestry, home-based, and domestic work in India are usually invisible and not covered by social protection.”

It is amidst these glaring realities that the AROSP network calls for a transformative, rights-based social protection that can easily be accessed by the marginalised workers across South Asia. It underscores that the provision of social protection is the state’s responsibility. As a culmination of the two day meeting, the participants have come together to form a South Asian Alliance that will work to pressure the South Asian governments to adopt a grassroots-oriented social protection, the participants are committed to building a strong alliance of marginalised workers in South Asia that will actively campaign for social protection for all.

Tributes

Prakash Khushal Parmar died due to Silicosis in Gujarat on 07th September 2014. His elder brother had also died of silicosis.

Kanti Mulji Parmar died due to Silicosis in Gujarat on 04th September 2014. Kanti lost his elder brother Mahesh to Silicosis in 2006. Mahesh and Kanti both could not marry because of social discrimination they met with. Kanti was pushed out of labor market when he was unable to work anymore. He was only 35. He would cook his own food or some neighbour would supply him. A couple of days before his death, he told his neighbour that few days back he had no food for two days and then on third day he was so hungry that he started looking for some left overs. He found a piece of Roti (Indian bread) in a corner, half eaten by the rat. He pulled it for himself and ate it to fill his belly.

Bashir Malek lost his struggle with Silicosis on 5th Aug 2014 late evening at a hospital in Baroda

Regional News

Study can help miners assess bauxite exposure

Nagpur: Most occupational diseases among miners cannot be treated or reversed. In order to help these miners be wary of the health hazards, National Institute of Miners’ Health (NIMH) has conducted a first-of-its-kind study to identify three biomarkers, or cell components, that can help assess the level of bauxite exposure. They have also
been able to conclude the level of exposure that becomes harmful for the health of the person.

In perhaps the first study of its kind, scientists of NIMH studied the effects of bauxite exposure on around 300 miners from three different open cast mines. Under the project titled, 'Systematic study of potential biomarker of occupational diseases in bauxite miners', they studied biomarkers like Hemeoxygenase-1 (HO-1), Neopterin and Parathyroid hormones (PTH). It was concluded that exposure to bauxite leads to lower levels of PTH and higher levels of both HO-1 and Neopterin.

"Despite considerable progress in diagnostic technology, early detection of occupational diseases has remained a challenge for medical science. With early detection and prevention being the only options, identification of suitable biomarkers related to the various occupational diseases becomes all the more important," said principal investigator of the study, Shubhangi Pingale. These biomarkers, she said, can be used by epidemiologists, physicians and scientists to study diseases as predictive, prognosis and diagnostic purposes.

"I feel weak, drained all the time," Baleman Sundi gasped, pushing the words out before she lost her breath. "But I must work." The 65-year-old paused, inhaled. "I don't have a choice." Another gasp. "I have to eat."

Abandoned asbestos mines still a hazard in India

By KATY DAIGLE December 22, 2014 10:18 AM

RORO VILLAGE, India (AP) — Asbestos waste spills in a grey gash down the flank of a lush green hill above tribal villages in eastern India. Three decades after the mines were abandoned, nothing has been done to remove the enormous, hazardous piles of broken rocks and powdery dust left behind.

In Roro Village and other settlements below, people who never worked in the mines are dying of lung disease. Yet in a country that treats asbestos as a saviour that provides cheap building materials for the poor, no one knows the true number and few care to ask.

"I feel weak, drained all the time," Baleman Sundi gasped, pushing the words out before she lost her breath. "But I must work." The 65-year-old paused, inhaled. "I don't have a choice." Another gasp. "I have to eat."

Sundi and 17 others from a clutch of impoverished villages near the abandoned hilltop mines were diagnosed in 2012 with asbestosis, a fatal lung disease. One has since died. Tens of thousands more remain untested and at risk. Asbestos makes up as much as 14.3 percent of the soil around Roro Village, analysis of samples gathered by The Associated Press showed.

The 17 surviving patients are suing in the country's environmental court for clean-up, compensation and a fund for future victims. If they win, the case would set precedents for workplace safety and corporate liability, both often ignored in India.

Neither the government nor the Indian company that ran the mines from 1963 to 1983 has made any move to clean up the estimated 700,000 tons of asbestos tailings and debris left scattered across several kilometers (miles) of hilly mining area.

"The company had followed all rules and procedures for closure of a mine and had complied with the provisions of the law, as in force in 1983," a spokesman for Hyderabad Asbestos Cement Products Ltd., now known as HIL Ltd., told AP.

Dust in the lung

An estimated six million people in China suffer from pneumoconiosis, also known as black lung disease. After reporting on this disease, journalist Wang Keqin was compelled to launch an online civil movement to increase public awareness and set up a dedicated fund to provide victims with medical aid.

Wang is committed to raising public awareness through fund-raising events and visiting villages in rural China affected by the disease. He remains uncertain about how his efforts are helping to fight what is now the deadliest workplace disease in China.

This is the story of one newsman and his fight for the workers of China.

Filmmakers' view- By Phil Yan and Richard Liang

"In China, there are about six million pneumoconiosis sufferers. They have no way out and their only option is to wait for death with no dignity."
These were the words of Wang Keqin that hurt us the most when we filmed him for the first time. As we quickly discovered, the six million figure that Wang was referring to not only included the six million people who currently suffer from pneumoconiosis, but the six million families who have also been dragged into a nightmare that often results in the death of their relatives.

Almost all of those suffering from the disease are migrant workers who live at the bottom of society. China is developing quickly and the country is fast becoming an economic power in the East. In the process, migrant workers have become China's indispensable labour force but, because of the lack of information, they have no idea how to protect themselves. Read More

Benzene and worker cancers: 'An American tragedy'

Bloated and bed-ridden, his skin browned by blood transfusions, John Thompson succumbed to leukemia on November 11, 2009.

A carpenter by trade, Thompson, then 70, had spent much of his life building infrastructure for the petrochemical industry in his native Texas — synthetic rubber plants in Port Neches, chemical facilities in Orange. Throughout the 1960s and early 1970s, he often encountered benzene, stored on job sites in 55-gallon drums, which he used as a cleaning solvent. He dipped hammers and cutters into buckets full of the sweet-smelling liquid; to expunge tar, he soaked gloves and boots in it.

Thompson never figured the chemical could do him harm. Not when it stung his hands or turned his skin chalky white. Not even when it made him faint. But after being diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia in 2006, relatives say, he came to believe his exposure to benzene had amounted to a death sentence. Oil and chemical companies knew about the hazard, Thompson felt, but said nothing to him and countless other workers.

“They put poison on his skin and in the air he breathed,” said Chase Bowers, Thompson’s nephew. “He died because of it.”

Thompson died before a lawsuit filed by his family against benzene suppliers could play out in court, where science linking the chemical to cancer could be put on display. Over the past 10 years, however, scores of other lawsuits, most filed by sick and dying workers like Thompson, have uncovered tens of thousands of pages of previously secret documents detailing the petrochemical industry’s campaign to undercut that science.

Internal memorandums, emails, letters and meeting minutes obtained by the Center for Public Integrity over the past year suggest that America’s oil and chemical titans, coordinated by their trade association, the American Petroleum Institute, spent at least $36 million on research “designed to protect member company interests,” as one 2000 API summary put it.

By Kristen Lombardi, 7:00 am, December 4, 2014, Read More

Articles on Asbestos Issue on IBAS website

Graphics: Charts and Maps on Asbestos

The production and consumption data used in the following charts and maps (click on titles or thumbnails for full-size images) are sourced from United States Geological Survey (USGS) reports.2 (In presenting these reports the USGS draws attention to the fact that the accuracy of data is no better than to three significant digits and that there are sometimes difficulties in obtaining trade statistics from some countries in a timely manner.) In the case of asbestos producer countries there are often erratic fluctuations of apparent consumption from year to year; some current production may be stockpiled or exports made from accumulated stock. For consumers, stockpiling can also occur and the timing of large shipments can skew the annual apparent consumption figures. To address this problem, in our more recent compilations (shown first), we have tried to obtain smoother representations of trends by averaging data over three year intervals, then applying these average values to the "midpoint years."

Courtesy IBAS, read More

World Congress Bars German Asbestos Victims by Laurie Kazan-Allen

It would seem logical for key stakeholders in German occupational health and safety to be welcomed at an event intended to provide a
“platform for the exchange of information and views to experts in occupational safety and health (OSH), representatives of enterprises and workers (the social partners), decision-makers in governments and public authorities, and anyone else active in the area of OSH.” Such an event is now taking place in Frankfurt. It is the XX World Congress for Safety and Health at Work. Although, one would expect the groups backing this important meeting—the German Social Accident Insurance, the International Social Security Association and the International Labor Organization—to favour a policy of inclusion, it has not proved to be the case, as representatives of the German Federal Association of Asbestos Victims’ Groups (Asbestose Selbsthilfegruppe) have discovered. Despite multiple attempts to engage with the organizers over several months, no provision has been made for the voice of Germany’s asbestos victims to be heard. This marginalization comes as no surprise to key German activists who explained that the German hosts of the XX World Congress for Safety and Health at Work are the Deutsche Gesetzliche Unfallversicherung (German Social Accident Insurance Institution/DGUV); the DGUV is the organization in charge of the Berufsgenossenschaften (the German Employer’s Liability Insurance Agency), a body which has continually and aggressively blocked legitimate compensation claims by German asbestos victims.

From rather small beginnings, IMIG has grown to be recognized as the premier biennial calendar fixture for mesothelioma experts. The success of the IMIG event was this year underscored by the presence at the meeting in Cape Town of a U.S. toxicologist David Bernstein who has undertaken commissions for Canadian, Brazilian, U.S. and other asbestos stakeholders. He was not the only asbestos industry delegate at IMIG. Dr Markus Heitz from Becon (Switzerland) also attended; Becon is the holding company for the Swiss Eternit company. Also present was a former employee of Everite, a South African asbestos-cement company which in 2002 made the transition to asbestos-free technology. Read More

Australia’s Asbestos Awareness Month by Laurie Kazan-Allen

Asbestos is a hot button subject in Australia. There are front-page newspaper articles, mini-series and folk songs about it and around the country there exist a multiplicity of agencies and dozens of self-help and campaigning groups dedicated to supporting victims and spreading awareness. These initiatives emerged in response to the deadly plague sweeping the country. When it comes to asbestos cancer, Australia is up there with the world’s leaders. The elevated national incidence of asbestos-related disease is a direct result of the country’s long-term love affair with the deadly dust. Between 1945 and 1975, Australia was the highest per capita user of asbestos in the world. It is little wonder then that Australia has the world’s second highest (after the UK) incidence of the signature asbestos cancer, mesothelioma. Since the early 1980s, more than 4,700 Australians have died from mesothelioma; over the coming four decades, epidemiologists predict that a further 25,000 will succumb to this aggressive cancer.

For a number of years, November has been regarded as the de facto month for outreach and media work to raise asbestos awareness amongst the public, workers, consumers, home owners and other at-risk groups. I was invited last month to participate in a number of “asbestos” activities in Victoria and Western Australia and to engage with colleagues and journalists in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). I was privileged to not only meet with grassroots activists but also take part in...
discussions with prominent experts and campaigners.

On November 17 and 18, 2014, the inaugural International Conference on Asbestos Awareness and Management took place in Melbourne under the auspices of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency (ASEA). Global and national experts representing a diverse range of groups including victims’ organizations, campaigning bodies, trade unions, employers’ associations and commercial enterprises participated in plenary and workshop sessions dedicated to quantifying the challenges being faced and devising practical solutions. Read More

Italy’s Asbestos Mystery by Laurie Kazan-Allen

The Italian Prosecutor at the center of the historic criminal prosecutions of former asbestos businessmen for the deaths of thousands of Italian citizens (see: Postscript to the Great Asbestos Trial) is now investigating reports of asbestos imports to Italy in 2012 despite the fact that the country banned asbestos a decade previously. Public Prosecutor Raffaele Guariniello has called on the “polizia giudiziaria,” the police authority working for the investigating magistrates, to trace deliveries and documentation for asbestos shipments from India to Italy.

Officials at Customs and Excise have not only confirmed that asbestos was imported but also established that these imports continued throughout 2014. As of now (January 14, 2015), no one has been charged or indicted over this flagrant breach of Italian law.

Guariniello’s actions have been widely reported in the Italian media and were prompted by data published in February 2014 by the Indian Bureau of Mines. Figures in the “asbestos” section of the Indian Minerals Yearbook 2012 reveal that in that year India exported 1,296 tonnes (t) of asbestos, 1,040t (80%) to Italy. Amongst the countries listed in Table 12 as importers of Indian asbestos-cement products were Saudi Arabia (1998), Qatar (2010), Israel (2011), South Africa (2008) and Oman (2008), all of whom have, like Italy, banned asbestos. Investigations regarding these illegal shipments are also underway in Israel and South Africa. Read More

Japanese docs trying to stop all asbestos use in Asia

JAKARTA – Japanese doctors are stepping up efforts to help Asia’s developing economies stop using asbestos, sharing knowledge bitterly learned in Japan about the serious and fatal illnesses caused by the material that was used in abundance during the post-war economic boom through the 1970s. Emerging economies continue using the affordable but hazardous silicate minerals “because they are still in the process of development and because the 30- to 50-year latent period of mesothelioma has prevented widespread recognition of future costs,” said Ken Takahashi, a professor at the University of Occupational and Environmental Health, Japan.

In October, Takahashi led an Asia-Pacific workshop in Jakarta on sound management of industrial chemicals. The workshop was organized by the Asia Asbestos Initiative, a program that Takahashi launched in 2008 in collaboration with the U.N. Environmental Program.

Indonesia remains one of the world’s biggest asbestos users, but public awareness of the risks posed by inhaling the carcinogen is still low. The country’s largest asbestos product plant, located in the outskirts of Cikarang, West Java, for example, has a disposal site nearby where local residents, including children, frequently scavenge metals to earn a living.

A nongovernmental organization reported four years ago that residents in the area were exposed to the risks of asbestos, sending a shock wave throughout Canada, an exporter of the carcinogenic substance to the Southeast Asian country.

Asia consumes some 70 percent of the asbestos produced in the world and Indonesia is the third-largest consumer after China and India.

Regulations to control the use of asbestos are loose in Indonesia, and effective technologies to detect malignant mesothelial tumors and asbestosis are not yet available.

Although an incident similar to Japan’s asbestos epidemic has yet to occur in Indonesia, asbestos-induced tragedies are occurring “day after day,” said Dimu Pratama, 28, a member of the NGO.

By Tatsuya Tsujimura Read More
Asbestos inertia will cost lives

Banning asbestos should not be a controversial decision. The links between asbestos and cancer, particularly mesothelioma, have been clearly established and the World Health Organisation could not be clearer in its stance against its use. Large companies involved in its manufacture have paid substantial amounts of money in compensation to victims. So far, more than 50 countries have instituted a ban, even if some still permit highly specialised uses.

Still, despite all the international evidence, consistent recommendations from the industry and public health ministries and the persistence of anti-asbestos campaigners, the cabinet has again shown there is a lack of will to ban the substance in Thailand. Last month it decided not to adopt a Public Health Ministry proposal that would have phased out the use and production of asbestos. Read More

Government U-turn on killer asbestos after firm took officials out for lunch

Civil servants agreed to a U-turn on problematic form of asbestos after the firm which manufactured it entertained three officials to lunch and flew one of them to England, declassified government files reveal.

A file on asbestos gives an insight into the pressure which big asbestos firms brought to bear on mid-ranking civil servants — and the potentially deadly consequences for decades to come.

Turner and Newall, one of the UK’s largest companies at the time, had set up Turners Asbestos Cement Co Ltd in Ballyclare in the 1960s. Ultimately, Turner and Newall was to be overwhelmed by multi-million pound claims for compensation and it finally went under in 2001.

Company documents later revealed that for many years Turner and Newall knowingly exposed its employees to lethal asbestos, and used a PR firm to play down the risks to health, while making huge profits.

One file released at the Public Records Office in Belfast under the new 20-year-rule records many years of asbestos issues. The file is only being released now as it was not closed until 1986. By Sam McBride Read More

Urban demolitions spread asbestos as precautions forsaken

As buildings are demolished all over Istanbul in the scope of various urban transformation projects, the proper measures are not being taken to prevent the spread of the cancerous material asbestos, according to a report in the Taraf daily on Sunday.

Opposition Republican People’s Party (CHP) deputy Haluk Eyidoğan, who spoke with Taraf, submitted a parliamentary inquiry to the Ministry of Environment and Urban Planning. According to the response he received, the ministry is unable to obtain reliable information from the relevant municipalities regarding buildings with materials containing asbestos, and they are thereby unable to take the proper measures during demolitions.

“When buildings are demolished they are sprayed with hoses, which allows the particles to spread throughout the city,” said Eyidoğan. A significant percentage of older apartment buildings in Istanbul were built using asbestos products.

“Due to demolitions, it is unclear how much asbestos there is, to what extent it is spreading and how it is affecting people,” said the opposition parliamentarian. Read More

Trial requested for 33 in Olivetti asbestos case

(ANSA) - Ivrea, December 19 - Prosecutors in the northern Italian town of Ivrea on Friday requested a court indict 33 people over deaths linked to asbestos at an Olivetti factory.

Among the people prosecutors requested be sent to trial for culpable homicide were high-profile Italian business figures Carlo De Benedetti, Roberto Colaninno and Corrado Passera, who was also Italy’s transport and industry minister from 2011 to 2013. De Benedetti was president of the IT Company, now part of the Telecom Italia group, from 1978 to 1996, Passera was its co-managing director from September 1992 to July 1996, while former Alitalia president Colaninno had a stint as CEO after that.

The case relates to suspicious deaths of 14 workers at the Olivetti factory in Ivrea, near Turin, who did
jobs ranging from assembling typewriters, machine maintenance and painting.

The workers, who died after their retirements between 2003 and early 2013, had been employed between the 1960s and 1990s in areas of the plant that were contaminated with asbestos fibers. They were subsequently been diagnosed with illnesses including mesothelioma, a cancer linked to asbestos. Judges in the Court of Appeal in Turin had convicted an executive, Ottorino Beltrami, in November 2012. Read More

Asbestos risk in Australia similar to in crisis-hit Britain

The United Kingdom is in the grips of an asbestos epidemic with the latest projections showing one in 170 of all British men born in the 1940s will die of mesothelioma.

While the UK mesothelioma rate is the highest in the world, it is followed on a per capita basis by Australia – with both countries experiencing a projected rise in death rates and grappling to remediate homes and buildings which commonly contained bonded asbestos sheeting and lagging around pipes.

The British Parliament this year passed legislation to operate a $600 million fund - funded by the insurance industry - for mesothelioma victims diagnosed after July 2012 who can no longer trace former employers to sue for exposure. About 300 payouts of about $200,000 are expected each year.

Ironically, the British Houses of Parliament themselves are extensively contaminated with asbestos and facing closure for up to five years while they undergo a removal and refurbishment program at a reported cost of $5 billion.

November 14, 2014, Emma Macdonald, Read More

Malignant Pleural and Peritoneal Mesothelioma Consequential to Brief Indirect Asbestos Exposure

This report highlights that pleural and peritoneal mesothelioma can occur without direct asbestos exposure as was seen in our young patient. The patient had indirect exposure for as short as 3 months as a child, 15 years earlier, when she was residing with her miner father in the district of Jharia, Jharkhand, which is an asbestos-rich mining area in eastern India. The patient presented with chest pain and breathlessness. Chest X-ray showed opaque right hemithorax. Typical contrast-computed tomography (CECT) enhanced radiological features included nodular, soft-tissue attenuation and homogenously enhancing rind-like mass causing scalloping of the underlying lung and liver. Similar lesions were also found involving the pelvis. Diagnosis of malignant mesothelioma was confirmed on lung biopsy. Under-reporting of exposure is usual because it is unrecognized by both patients and investigators.

Conclusion - Malignant mesothelioma involving the pleura or peritoneum is a rare but fatal disease. Widespread use of asbestos-containing products in the developing world ensures that this highly fatal disease will continue to represent a serious public health problem worldwide.

Despite the fact that most cases of malignant mesothelioma are secondary to the inhalation of asbestos fibers, a few patients present with no known source of asbestos exposure. Some exposures fail to be recognized and are therefore not reported. Like in our case, even small amount of exposure and indirect exposure through other asbestos-exposed family members can be associated with development of malignant mesothelioma. Our case was unusual due to the young age of the patient and limited indirect asbestos exposure. A short period of indirect exposure during childhood is often ignored by the patient and in several cases not known to the patient, leading to under-reporting of cases.

By - Bharati Singhal, Supreethi Kohli, Anu Singhal, Vinod Kumar, Read More

Asbestos: The Killer That Still Surrounds Us

Andrew Lawson was the kind of man whose force of personality could shake things up, even in a gargantuan organisation like the NHS. A consultant anaesthetist, he devoted his career to sparing the sick both the agonies of illness and the torments of treatment. Among those who sought him out, his wife remembers, was an MI6 officer who had to live with the crippling after-effects of torture.

Lawson understood that while doctors are captivated by diagnoses and diseases, those being
treated are overwhelmingly concerned with something else entirely: pain.

One day in 2007, however, he was the one who began to suffer. “I have not felt myself,” he wrote in May that year. “I’ve had difficulty in energising myself.” Struggling with flu-like symptoms, he found himself impatiently berating his wife, Juliet. “I want everything to happen sooner rather than later,” he noted. When Juliet went away on business for a week, Lawson found himself unusually, and unaccountably, upset. Something was up.

He got a colleague to perform a chest X-ray. Just two weeks earlier he had been skiing in the French Alps. The results of the X-ray came back. He had mesothelioma, an incurable cancer that affects the pleura, or lining of the lung.

With most cancers, it is hard to know the exact cause. Though some smokers get lung cancer, for example, not all lung cancer sufferers have smoked. But mesothelioma is different. In almost every case, the cause is exposure to asbestos – a fibrous building material once dubbed “miraculous”, but now known to be mortally dangerous.

By Harry De Quetteville, Read More

The Australian Mesothelioma Registry 3rd Data Report

The Australian Mesothelioma Registry (AMR) has released its third annual data report.

The report focuses on mesothelioma cases diagnosed during 2013 and notified to the Registry up to 31 May 2014.

Asbestos exposure information is also presented and is based on people diagnosed with mesothelioma who completed the survey recruitment process by 30 April 2014. Asbestos exposure is estimated through the completion of an exposure questionnaire and a personal interview that are designed to assess the likelihood of occupational and non-occupational exposure to asbestos.

As the AMR has only been fully operational since July 2010 there is not yet sufficient information to draw definitive conclusions about past asbestos exposures. However, over time this knowledge will accumulate and provide valuable insight into sources of asbestos exposure.

Key findings of the report include:

Diagnoses - As at 31 May 2014:

- The AMR had received 575 notifications of people newly diagnosed with mesothelioma between 1 January and 31 December 2013. Of these people, 465 were males and 110 were females, and the majority (80.0%) were aged 65 years or over at the time of diagnosis.
- The age-standardised mesothelioma incidence rate in 2013 was 2.2 cases per 100 000 person-years.
- 218 (37.9%) mesothelioma patients diagnosed in 2013 were recorded as having died. Where the cause of death was known, 89.4% were recorded as being due to mesothelioma.

Read More

Study: Cosmetic talc products carry asbestos peril

Talc, the fine, powdery mineral used in thousands of consumer products by everyone from newborns to the elderly, can be a killer when it's contaminated with asbestos, which some public health experts say happens far more often than miners and manufacturers acknowledge.

In an explosive new study, scientists from three different laboratories worked for more than a year to track asbestos-contaminated talc from the mines to a popular body-powder product, then into the lung tissue of a woman who died of asbestos-caused mesothelioma after years of using the product.

For years, medical researchers have encountered many reports of women having mesothelioma without any identifiable exposure to asbestos in their histories. Yet the only known cause of mesothelioma, an almost invariably fatal cancer, is asbestos.

"Of course we knew that there was asbestos contaminating the talc in many cosmetic powders, but who would have ever thought that that's the way these women were being exposed?" said pathologist Ronald Gordon, one of three authors of the extensive study on mesothelioma and talc products published online in the International
The end of the Jeffrey asbestos mine in Quebec

Dramatic developments regarding closure of the Jeffrey asbestos mine

In October 2012, the newly elected Parti Québécois government of Quebec announced that it was cancelling the $58 million loan that the previous Liberal government of Jean Charest had given to the owners of the Jeffrey mine for the purpose of opening an underground mine that would export millions of tons of asbestos overseas, particularly to Asia, for years to come.

The Parti Québécois was a minority government. In April 2014, seeking a majority, it called an early election. It was defeated and the Liberal Party of Quebec, under a new leader, Philippe Couillard, regained power.

In August, it was learned that the Parti Québécois (PQ) had never, in fact, officially cancelled the $58 million loan. The necessary decree to cancel the loan had not been passed and the loan was still available. The current Minister of the Economy, Innovation and Exports, Jacques Daoust, accused the former PQ government of negligence. Daoust announced that his government has now signed the decree to cancel the loan.

Thus, the Liberal government, which just two years earlier gave the loan, cancelled the loan.

This is a dramatic reversal of policy by the Liberal Party of Quebec, which has always been a strong supporter of the asbestos industry. Just four years ago, every political party in the Quebec National Assembly, in fact, supported the mining and export of asbestos. So strong was the taboo against challenging the asbestos industry that asbestos victims and their families did not speak up publicly and no asbestos victims group existed in Quebec.

Today, not a single political party in Quebec supports the asbestos industry. First, Québec Solidaire in August 2010 called for an end to the mining and export of asbestos. Two years later, in August 2012, both the Parti Québécois and the Coalition Avenir Québec ended their support for the asbestos industry. And now the Liberal Party of Quebec has reversed its position.

Ban on asbestos and asbestos-containing products pushed

Lawmakers are calling for the outright ban of the importation, manufacture, processing, use and distribution of the dangerous and disease-causing asbestos and asbestos-containing products. Reps. Walden Bello and Ibarra Gutierrez III of the Akbayan Partylist said while there was already a resolution to totally ban asbestos in the Philippines during the 11th National Occupational Safety and Health Congress in October 2008, the country continuously uses the substance.

In fact, Bello said, latest statistics show that the Philippines is the fourth largest importer of asbestos at $76.32 million annually. "The current policy is one of control by regulation of the use and disposal of asbestos products. There is a ban on crocidolite or blue asbestos and amosite or brown asbestos while the use of chrysolite or white asbestos is not banned and permitted in high density products as fire proofing, clothing, roofing felts or related products, asbestos cement roofing and flat sheet, friction materials, high temperature textile products etc.," Bello said.

This, Bello said, is alarming because exposure to asbestos even in very minute amounts could lead to asbestosis, lung cancer and mesothelioma, which are only some of the devastating illnesses caused by the substance. The World Health Organization (WHO), in coordination with the International Labor Organization (ILO) and other intergovernmental organizations and civil society, resolved to work with countries towards elimination of asbestos-related diseases by stopping the use of all types of asbestos, according to Bello.

Call to ban asbestos use and imports

The Toxicology Information Unit of the National Hospital has called upon the construction authorities and the public to refrain from using asbestos sheets in houses due to the adverse health impact. National Toxicology Information...
Unit Head, Dr. Waruna Gunathilake told the Sunday Observer, "It is now medically proven that long-term exposure to asbestos can cause respiratory problems and cancer. Research in recent years has proved this," he said.

"Many Western countries including Canada, Britain and Australia had banned the use of asbestos in the building industry following these studies. "It is mostly used in our region mainly due to its low price", he said.

Those who have asbestos ceilings should replace them with safer substitutes such as Sinhala ulu or Amano sheets.

However, since this switch cannot be done overnight, we call upon the housing and construction industry to phase out the use of asbestos in Sri Lanka during the next few years, till people obtain suitable alternatives." by Carol Aloysius Read More

Asbestos Pushed in Asia as Product for the Poor

New Delhi — Outlawed in much of the developed world, asbestos is still going strong in the developing one. In India alone, the world's biggest asbestos importer, it's a $2 billion industry providing 300,000 jobs.

The International Labor Organization, World Health Organization, medical researchers and more than 50 countries say the mineral should be banned; asbestos fibers lodge in the lungs and cause disease. The ILO estimates 100,000 people die from workplace exposure every year.

But the industry executives at the recent asbestos conference, held in a luxury New Delhi hotel, said the risks are overblown.

Instead, they described their business as a form of social welfare for hundreds of thousands of impoverished Indians still living in flimsy, mud-and-thatch huts.

"We're here not only to run our businesses, but to also serve the nation," said Abhaya Shankar, a director of India's Asbestos Cement Products Manufacturers Association.

Yet there are some poor Indians trying to keep asbestos out of their communities.

In the farming village of Vaishali, in the eastern state of Bihar, residents became outraged by the construction of an asbestos factory in their backyard. Read More

Chrysotile Information Center Agent Fails to Muddle Process in Raising Philippine Standard for Asbestos in the Workplace

An agent of the lobby group Chrysotile Information Center (CIC) tried but failed to muddle the tripartite technical working group meeting of the National Programmes for the Elimination of the Asbestos-Related Diseases (NPEAD) in finalizing the Philippine standards for asbestos in the workplace a few days ago.

The partners in banning asbestos in the Philippines, the Associated Labor Unions (ALU) and the Building Woodworkers International (BWI) lobbied for Philippine government to lower the country's threshold limit value for asbestos toxic dust from 0.5 to 0.1 fibers per cubic centimeter of air in an 8-hour work span by revising the guidelines for the implementation of asbestos safety program in the workplace.

Paul Roxas, who said he represent CIC attended for the first time the meeting of the group held the other day, questioned the basis of Philippine Labor department's Occupational Safety and Health Center (OSHC) in changing the threshold limit value. The new standard puts the Philippine workplace standards for asbestos equivalent to that of the workplace standards of highly-developed countries.

Mr. Roxas quoted alleged scientific evidence absolving the toxicity of Chrysotile asbestos in asserting asbestos industry lobby arguments. He also aided the Association of Chrysotile Industries of the Philippines (ACIP) representatives in stonewalling the implementation of the guidelines.

However, ALU policy advocacy officer Alan Tanjusay questioned the personality of CIC in the tripartite meeting and accused Mr. Roxas of disrespect and discourtesy to the NPEAD body who had been working and meeting on asbestos issues on various occasions in the last five years. He also warned Mr. Roxas not to delay the proceedings with his arguments that has been disputed by victims
themselves, the World Health Organization (WHO), IARC, ILO and other health experts.

Dr. Dina Diaz, resident pulmonologist of the Lung Center of the Philippines (LCP), disproved his argument with authority as a seasoned medical expert. Dr. Diaz is the country’s famous doctor who examined 1,500 workers after being exposed to asbestos while working in the former U.S naval base in Subic, Philippines.

The meeting ended, though, in the submission of the draft to and approval by the highest labor policy-making body the Tripartite Industry Peace Council. The guidelines will take effect by mid-2015. As a pioneering union in the country, ALU is a member of the council.

Ban asbestos Philippines noted the entry of CIC and its agents in the Philippine NPEAD process after sponsoring the trip of a Philippine lawmaker and his wife, one environment and two occupational health officials to the Eternit Manufacturing Plant and to an open-pit Chrysotile mine in Minacu, Goais, Brazil on August 1-10, 2014 under the scheme “Open Doors Program of SAMA S.A Mineracoes Associades.”

The contingent was accompanied by Roxas and another CIC Philippines staff Ms. Ivana Aguiling and representatives from CIC Thailand.

With the entry of CIC in the Philippines, the ban campaign expects it will become more active in Philippine congress in lobbying against BWI and ALU ban asbestos bill and in the NPEAD process that works for the progressive ban of asbestos in the country.

Pulmonary fibrosis asbestos link found

Many cases of a common lung disease that were assumed to be of no known cause are in fact the result of exposure to asbestos, scientists believe.

Researchers from Imperial College London found a correlation between death rates in England and Wales from the known asbestos-related conditions asbestosis and mesothelioma and from “idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis” (IPF).

In findings presented to the European Respiratory Society (ERS) international congress in Munich, Germany, they warn that at present people with a history of asbestos exposure may be missing out on appropriate care, as they are not currently able to access new treatments for IPF.

According to the researchers, asbestosis is the name given to the lung fibrosis developed by people with a known history of exposure to asbestos; IPF is an identical condition, just without the asbestos association being made. Their analysis of UK Office of National Statistics data revealed national and regional correlations between the three diseases.

This supports the theory that a proportion of IPF cases are due to “unknown” exposure to asbestos. They also identified high rates of IPF deaths in particular regions in the North West and South East of England with a history of shipyard work and potential exposure to asbestos dust.

Lead researcher Dr Carl Reynolds from Imperial College London said: “The findings are consistent with the hypothesis that a proportion of IPF cases are likely to be caused by unknown exposure to asbestos. More research is needed in this area, particularly as patients known to have asbestos exposure are not currently considered to be candidates for new treatments for IPF and this may be inappropriate.”

Read More

Worker from iPhone factory dies of cancer - days after mother begged Apple for help: Young Chinese man is the sixth to die at the complex in southern China

A young Chinese worker struck down with leukaemia while working in a factory that makes Apple’s iPhones has died – days after his mother pleaded in The Mail on Sunday for Apple chief executive Tim Cook to help save her son’s life.

Yi Long is at least the sixth worker to die of leukaemia after falling ill at the factory complex in Shenzhen, southern China, in a cluster of cases families believe may be triggered by the chemicals handled by workers.

Yi, whose case was highlighted in a Mail on Sunday investigation, fell into a coma five days ago and was taken by his family from a hospital near the factory.
after doctors declared there was no hope. Read More

**Samsung semiconductor workers: lymphoma, and no compensation**

Workers who handled dangerous chemicals left without assistance because they’re subcontractors

In November 2011, Na Yu-byechong (51, not his real name) started working on lines no. 15 and 16 at a Samsung Electronics semiconductor plant in Hwaseong, Gyeonggi Province. He was assigned to the central chemical supply system (CCSS), which supplies the various chemicals needed in each phase of manufacturing semiconductors.

Na’s main job was to bring drums full of solvents and other chemicals from the warehouse and hook them up to the equipment. When he attached the drum to the pipe, the system would automatically dispense as much chemicals as were needed for the process.

A sign posted at the CCSS where Na was working said “Danger, carcinogens.”

In December of the following year - barely a year after he started working - Na started getting headaches, and his back started itching. When he visited the doctor, he was diagnosed with cutaneous T-cell lymphoma, a kind of skin cancer.

Na believes that his disease is closely related to his work at the factory. Every day when he hooked the drums of chemicals up to the CCSS, he got a strong whiff of chemicals. When the chemicals spilled, he would sometimes wipe them off with his hand as well.

Na quit his job at the factory in January 2013 and filed the incident with the Korea Workers’ Compensation and Welfare Service (COMWEL) in October 2014. Na was employed by an in-house subcontractor for Samsung Electronics.

Since the end of last year, interested parties have been discussing the question of how to compensate Samsung Electronics factory workers who have contracted leukaemia and other serious diseases.

The negotiations are being mediated by an arbitration committee that includes representatives from Samsung, a committee of families affected by the illnesses, and Banollim, a watchdog that defends the health and human rights of workers in the semiconductor industry.

For now, the chances that Na will receive compensation for his illness are negligible. Samsung said that it does not regard employees at its subcontractors as being eligible for compensation.

By Jeon Jong-hwi, staff reporter Read More

**Apple 'deeply offended' by BBC investigation**

Apple has said it is "deeply offended" by a BBC investigation into conditions for workers involved in manufacturing its devices.

Rules on workers' hours, ID cards, dormitories, work meetings and juvenile workers were routinely breached, the Panorama programme witnessed.

In a staff email, senior Apple executive Jeff Williams said he knew of no other company doing as much as Apple to improve conditions.

But he added: "We can still do better."

Panorama's editor Ceri Thomas said he stood by the programme's journalism.

He said the team had found an exhausted workforce making Apple products in China, as well as children working in extremely dangerous tin mines in Bangka, Indonesia.

"While Apple did confirm earlier this year that it gets tin from Bangka, it had never been confirmed whether illegal tin was entering their supply chain," he said.

"We got the first evidence of this on our trip.

19 December 2014, Read More

**Samsung's Devastating Secret: The Tears of 'Semiconductor Children'**

Over the past few years, Samsung Corporation has faced a number of troubling allegations about the health of some of its workers in the company's home base, South Korea.

Former workers and their families, along with labor activists, that conditions at the company's semiconductor factories have led to higher occurrences of illnesses such as leukemia and other cancers among former semiconductor workers.

In a new series, The Huffington Post Korea and its media partner, The Hankyoreh, report that long-
term exposure to toxic chemicals may not only have lasting effects for some former Samsung workers, but also for their children.

The issue of reproductive toxicity, when children fall ill because of the accumulation of various toxic compounds over a long period in their parents' bodies, has not surfaced very often because many parents blame themselves and keep their children's condition hidden. It is difficult for those who often could not even fathom blaming their company for their own sicknesses to connect their children’s illnesses to their workplace.

Samsung Electronics and SK Hynix, world-class corporations and leaders of the Korean semiconductor industry, both deny the relationship between work conditions in semiconductor manufacturing and reproductive toxicity.

That reaction is similar to the first reports, in 2008, of "semiconductor industrial diseases" -- when former Samsung workers started attributing leukemia and other diseases they had developed to conditions in semiconductor factory work. While Samsung initially denied a link between the incidents and conditions at its plants, Korean courts ruled in several cases that former Samsung semiconductor workers with leukemia were victims of industrial accidents. The ubiquitous technology giant finally issued an apology in May 2014 to workers and their families, promising appropriate compensation to workers' families.

Huffington Post Korea, By 원성윤, 01/12/2014, Read More

E-waste market growth in India to surpass China's: Report

NEW DELHI: The E-waste market in India is expected to grow at a higher rate than in China in the next few years, said a report.

According to a research report, the E-waste market in India is expected to grow at a Compound Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) of 26 per cent during 2015-2019, while the E-waste management services market in China is forecast to grow at a CAGR of 19.41 per cent over the period 2013-2018.

As per the research report titled E-Waste Market in India 2015-2019, the need to prevent biological hazards is one of the major trends upcoming in this market.

"Growing need to reduce toxins discharged from unattended e-waste has triggered more investment in the market," the report said, adding that the average discard/replacement rates have increased with a corresponding increase in buying power.

The report by US-based ReportsnReports.com further said that lack of effective E-waste disposal mechanisms is hindering market growth.

PTI Dec 30, 2014, Read More

Electronics Watch releases a detailed mapping report of the ICT industry

Coinciding with the World Day for Decent Work, a new report published by the Electronics Watch Consortium has been released. The new report examines the complex production system of the ICT sector, maps extensively its key stakeholders and producer countries, and analyses the leverage of public buyers to change the abusive labour conditions in the industry.

Who are the leading ICT brands and contract manufacturers? In which countries do major brands and their suppliers operate? What are the most important labour issues in these countries? These are some of the questions addressed in the report "The ICT sector in the spotlight. Leverage of public procurement decisions on working conditions in the supply chain", published by the Electronics Watch Consortium and drafted by Weed, its German partner.

The report inspects ICT expenditure made by public purchasers and the products that they acquire the most, in order to provide insight into the leverage these organisations have, and to highlight its potential to improve the conditions of workers in
the electronics sector. It concludes with a summary of the changes that European public bodies could contribute to, and of the structural reforms that should be applied.

Among its conclusions, the research determines that the big brands cannot shirk responsibility claiming that they have not signed any contract directly with subcontractors. "Short product life cycles, competition for low prices and the need for flexibility are all directly linked to low wages, overtime and temporary employment via labour agencies.”

Major public purchasers can play the roles of catalyst and multiplier by requiring that the supply chain of the ICT products they buy through tenders becomes more transparent and by urging the big brands to take responsibility for their part.

Electronics Watch has developed an independent monitoring service for their public buyer members. Public bodies affiliated to this initiative will use common contract conditions to require ICT companies to comply with the labour standards of EW’s code of conduct. Electronics Watch collaborates with unions and labour rights groups in producer countries, not only to monitor working conditions at the factory level with expert local eyes and ears, but also to implement remediation programmes and promote sustainable improvements in labour conditions. If you are a public buyer, affiliate now and take part in this pioneering initiative.

The report said those practices were prevalent among the migrants from Bangladesh, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Vietnam and other countries who work in Malaysia’s nearly 200 electronics factories. Those factories, which produce consumer electronics, motherboards, computer peripherals and other electronic goods, account for a third of Malaysia’s exports and produce for many well-known companies, including Apple, Flextronics, Samsung and Sony.

The Verité report said that 92 percent of the migrant workers in Malaysia’s electronics industry had paid recruitment fees and that 92 percent of that group had paid fees that exceeded legal or industry standards, defined as more than one month’s wages.

The report said about half of the migrant workers who borrowed for their recruitment fees spent more than a year paying off those fees. According to the report, 94 percent of the migrants did not have their passports when Verité’s investigators interviewed them, and 71 percent said it would be impossible or difficult to get their passports back when needed.

By Steven Greenhouse

**Global electronics supplier NXP signs compromise CBA with union**

NXP Semiconductors Phils. agrees to hike workers wage by 5.25-percent for 2014, and 3.5-percent for 2015 and 2016. It reinstated only half of the 24 union officers it fired last May 5.

MANILA – Half of the 24 officers illegally sacked May 5 this year by electronics firm NXP got their jobs back last week as NXP management and the workers’ union finally conclude talks for a new collective bargaining agreement (CBA). The settlement leaves jobless the other half, 12 of the officers who led the negotiations and the subsequent union protest actions to achieve this new CBA.

Stalled since the end of March, the CBA negotiations ended with 5.25-percent wage hike for the first year, two points higher than the electronic giant’s long-held 3.5-percent offer, but nearly three points lower than the lowest workers’ demand. The
workers will receive a 3.5 percent hike, as the management wanted, for the next two years of the CBA.

The compromise settlement was mediated by representatives of the labor department, amid an atmosphere of “martial law” in the NXP plant and the economic zone where it is located in Cabuyao, Laguna.

From the start of CBA negotiations in January, NXP reportedly increased to more than 2,000 the number of contractual workers it hired. Unprecedented in NXP, the management took in as much number of contractual workers as regular workers, which counted to 2,100.

Following the illegal dismissal of union officers on May 5, the company and the Light Industry and Science Park 1 economic zone also increased the security forces inside the zone, inside the NXP plant and even inside the workers’ shuttle buses.

After the CBA was signed, the number of newly signed contractual workers started to go down, as well as the level of security forces deployed at workers’ pick up points to and from the LISP-1 gates to NXP plant and the number of police forces deployed near enclave stations, said Reden Alcantara, president of NXPCIWU (NXP Semiconductors Company Workers Union), an affiliate of NAFLU-KMU.

"I was originally going to represent Dewy, Cheatem and Howe," Neutra, former chief of California's Division of Environmental and Occupational Disease Control, told The Huffington Post after his address, given at the International Society for Environmental Epidemiology conference. "But my wife thought that was going too far."

The session on how corporate money is frequently funnelled into researchers’ pockets -- a move often undisclosed to the public or even to fellow scientists -- had been inspired by a growing number of real-life occurrences.

Late last year, it came to light that a beloved children's environmental health researcher had been downplaying the health risks of pesticides and lead paint while receiving hundreds of thousands of dollars from those very same industries. In March, an accomplished burn doctor was rebuked for fabricating a tale of a burned infant -- while serving as a hired spokesman for a chemical flame retardant industry front group that was created to fend off bans on their product. And controversy continues over the industry entanglement of a prestigious Italian researcher who has testified that continued exposure to asbestos poses little risk to public health.

Posted: 09/18/2014 3:05 pm EDT Lynne Peeples

Mobile phone quiz educates Cambodian factory workers

Cambodia has more mobile phone subscriptions than citizens: 1.34 per person on average, with a total of more than 20 million nationwide, according to UN agency the International Telecommunication Union. [1] Mobile phones are everywhere: from mountain-top temples to paddy fields to the backs of motorbikes zipping through Phnom Penh’s traffic jams. The cell phone does it all: it’s a work tool, a way of communicating, a teaching device, a gizmo and a necessary component of modern life.

And now, the mobile phone is at the heart of a project aimed at educating workers, promoting labour rights and improving communication within Cambodia’s largest export industry: clothes manufacturing. Kamako Chhnoeum, meaning ‘outstanding worker’ in Khmer, is run by the Better Factories Cambodia initiative, which is part of a...
A global partnership between UN agency the International Labour Organization and the International Finance Corporation, part of the World Bank Group. The project uses a software that includes voice response to quiz callers about their health, wages and benefits, and workplace safety, and to survey workers about the factories that employ them. By using the commonplace mobile phone, the project aims to reach many workers, collect information from them and provide information in return. Read More

Enslaved Abroad, Oppressed at Home: Modern Slavery in Bangladesh

In the last two months, more than 170 men, mostly Bangladeshis, have been rescued from human traffickers in the jungles of Thailand. Some of the men described how they had been offered work, but when they showed up, were drugged, tied up and dragged onto boats where they were beaten and starved. The news caused outrage among Bangladeshis, many of whom blamed their government for failing to protect its citizens. Others expressed dismay at the discovery that this kind of modern-day slavery still exists.

The fact that these men were so easily lured into bonded labor abroad is proof of the hopelessness of their lives at home. Although some of the men said that they had not known that they would be shipped to Thailand, most of them were ready to set sail into the unknown. They were desperate for work.

I grew up in Bangladesh where, in every middle-class household, there’s at least one live-in kajer meye — a maid or “working girl” — often with one or two of her young children serving the family. She works from morning until night, sometimes for very little money, sometimes just for food scraps and basic lodging.

By Lipika Pelham Oct. 29, 2014, Read More

Chinese companies caught falsifying environmental data

Two years after environmental groups revealed that Inner Mongolia’s Duolun Coal Chemistry Company was dumping its industrial waste, the company has again been found guilty of illegal pollution, according to a report in Securities Daily.

The company, which is owned by China Datang Corporation and uses brown coal to produce the polymer polypropylene, was last month penalised by China’s environment ministry for failing to take adequate measures to reduce the plant’s sulphur dioxide emissions. The company’s sulphur scrubbers were found to have been switched off for a total of 174 days last year.

State-owned enterprises like Duolun have been repeatedly found guilty of breaching environmental regulations. But their willingness to fake environmental data is perhaps even more shocking.

In mid-June, the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP) and the National Development and Reform Commission publicly named 19 companies it was penalising for faking desulfurisation figures. China’s five major electrical power companies, PetroChina and Shenhua (China’s largest state-owned coal producer) all appear on the list. For none of them was this the first violation.

The notice published by the government reveals that three subsidiaries of China Resources Group (CRG) were penalised and put under supervision. CRG benefits from a substantial electricity price subsidy for desulfurisation — the three companies in question receive more than 100 million Yuan each year (about US$16 million). Nonetheless, MEP investigators found their collective annual sulphur-dioxide emissions exceeded 30,000 tonnes

Unsafe workplaces killing Vietnam

Long periods of staring into welding flares have seriously damaged Nguyen Van Bang’s vision.

“'I'm still luckier than my many colleagues, who lost the use of their eyes after iron filings flew into them,” said the 31-year-old welder at a mechanical service factory in Ho Chi Minh City’s District 12.

Experts have warned about the rising predominance of work-related illnesses, which remain largely unexamined and untreated.
Bang said his vision loss isn’t the only hazard in his line of work.

“We suffer frequent coughing fits. We all know it’s because we’ve inhaled too many fumes and too much iron dust,” he said.

Government statistics show about 28,000 people suffer from occupational diseases, on average, per year.

Silicosis and other respiratory illnesses topped the list, followed by chemical poisoning.

Many companies continue to rely on cheap materials, antiquated technology and illegal and harmful chemicals to reduce input costs, the report noted.

All the corner cutting has posed a serious risk to public health.

In HCMC, Vietnam’s economic hub, the Center for Labor Health and Environment Protection examined more than 10,000 workers who claimed to suffer work-related injuries and chronic diseases in the first nine months of this year.

By Minh Hung, Thanh Nien News, Read More

**Bangladesh plastics factory fire kills at least 13 people**

At least 13 people including two women were killed when a fire swept through a plastics factory in Bangladesh’s capital Dhaka on Saturday.

Scores were injured and more people may have died at Nasim Plastic House in a crowded market in the suburb of Mirpur, a police official said.

“We are searching under a collapsed wall … There might be more bodies under the debris,” fire service and civil defence director AKM Shakil Newaz said.

Fire department control official Mohammed Farhaduzzaman said the fire broke out Saturday evening at the five-storey factory.

He said 13 bodies were recovered from the gutted building and three people were hospitalized with burn injuries. Read More

**12 killed in Pakistan mine collapse**

Islamabad: At least 12 miners died after a marble mine collapsed in Ziarat area of Mohmand Agency in Pakistan.

The miners were busy in excavation when the mine collapsed, and buried scores of labourers, Dawn online reported citing official sources as saying.

At least twelve bodies have been recovered while some are still under the rubble as locals are carrying out the rescue work, sources said.

Mine management in Pakistan lacks preventive and protective measures, as a result the number of fatal accidents are high.

Accidents are not recorded in the registry as required by law, and often go unchecked. Mine workers in Pakistan get a pittance for work considered one of the highest-risk activities in the world in terms of safety and health. Read More

**ILO, Cambodian Garment Manufacturers Agree to Eliminate Child Labor**

Child labor has been a problem plaguing Cambodia for years, and a new agreement between the International Labour Organization’s Better Factories Cambodia (BFC) and the Garment Manufacturers Association in Cambodia (GMAC) is the latest effort to eradicate it.

According to Xinhua News Agency, the two groups will sign an agreement Thursday designed to abolish child labor in Cambodia’s garment industry.

“The agreement emphasizes collaboration between BFC and GMAC in the process of identifying and remediating any confirmed cases of child labour,” the statement noted. “When workers under the age of 15 are identified, they are offered access to suitable vocational training institutes and are paid the equivalent of their average monthly factory pay until they reach 15.”

Factories will get financial support from GMAC to support age confirmation and remediation costs.

The Cambodian government has previously reaffirmed its commitment to end child labor with goals of reducing incidences across all sectors from 16.5% in 1999 to 8 percent in 2015, and eliminating
the worst forms of child labor, like performing hazardous work, completely by 2016.

Cambodia’s Labor Minister Ith Samheng stressed the importance of the collective action in protecting the “Made in Cambodia” brand name.

GMAC has been working with BFC, a project to monitor factories and help them maintain improvements, for the last 14 years to establish a zero tolerance policy toward child labor. “This agreement further solidifies our commitment and provides a positive remediation for those underage workers that slip through the crack and are found working in our member factories,” Xinhua reported GMAC president Van Sou Ieng as saying. Read More

10,000 children estimated to work in Nepal’s carpet industry

Aged 11, Sanju was sent by her parents in rural Nepal to work for a carpet factory in the capital Kathmandu. They were assured she would be paid and well looked after. That was the last they heard of her. Her new employer had her working from 4am until 8pm, seven days a week. She stitched knots until her fingers bled.

An animated video of Sanju’s story forms part of a global push to see the elimination of child labour included in the United Nations’ post-2015 development goals. Launched this week to coincide with End Child Slavery Week, the campaign is headed by child labour activist Kailash Satyarthi, joint winner of this year’s Nobel Peace prize. Among the beneficiaries of any such official commitment would be the underage workers in Nepal’s carpet industry. Illegal employment of minors is now “very, very prevalent” in the sector, according to Stephanie Odegard, a New York-based rug designer who has been sourcing from Nepal for nearly three decades.

Precise statistics are, almost by definition, difficult to come by. The US Department of Labor estimates as many as one in three children in Nepal work (88% of whom are employed in the agriculture sector). In the carpet industry specifically, the number is believed to be around 10,000 or so, according to Kul Gautam, former assistant secretary-general of the UN and ex-deputy executive director of Unicef. Nepal’s minimum working age is 14 years old.

Factory audits and surprise raids offer a degree of credence to such numbers. Anti-child labour organisation GoodWeave International (formerly known as Rugmark) has rescued 1,075 child workers from Nepal’s carpet factories since 1996. One of those is Sanju.

Initially set up by Satyarthi, GoodWeave certifies rug exporters as child-labour free. The non-profit group, which also operates in India and Afghanistan, counts around 80 certified exporters in Nepal. Collectively, these represent over 400 producers, which employ roughly 13,000 people.

“Child labour was very common in the early 1990s. It went down significantly – I think by about 75% - thanks to GoodWeave’s work... but now, because many companies cannot hire adult labourers, they are employing children again”, says Gautum. Read More