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

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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.

Cover page Photos Credit:
1. Photo by IISD/ENB (www.iisd.ca/chemical/cops/2015/13may.html)
2. Ziaul Haque (Bangladesh)
Pay up Our Fair Compensation

2nd Year of Rana Plaza Tragedy: Status of Rana Plaza Victims: Compensation and Rehabilitation

“I do not understand why compensation amount differs from one victim to another and why was I paid less compensation than someone else who was not injured as seriously as I am”. I know another worker who was not present on that tragic day but has received money” said Mr. Shafiquel Islam, Member of the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions Accidents Victims Rights Network while he showed his right hand which was permanently disabled during the fire in addition to describing other severe injuries on his body.

On the occasion of the second anniversary of the Rana Plaza tragedy, Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Foundation (OSHE) organized a National Round Table on Status of Rana Plaza Victims: Compensation and Rehabilitation on 22 April 2015 as a part of its ongoing action towards ensuring social protection for the workplace accident victims and affected families.

The objectives of the roundtable were to share information and experiences on the compensation and rehabilitation process; to review the measures taken at national level on the safety in workplaces and to undertake unified initiatives for concerned stakeholders.

Mr. Kazi Reazul Hoque, Full Time Member, National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) was present as the chief guest who stated that the Rana Plaza was a man-made disaster and compared the working conditions in the factories in Bangladesh to be similar to those of prisons. He said that even though the garment sector contributes the maximum to the GDP of the country and employs a large workforce of women, the working conditions are deplorable and needs to be improved urgently. He added that the money which the workers have received is neither compensation nor donation; it is right of workers and what is due to them.

President of National Coordination Committee for Workers’ Education (NCCWE), Mr. Abdul Mukit Khan, Mr. Kazi Saifuddin Ahmed, Labour Adviser of Bangladesh Employers Federation, Oman George, Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Hong Kong and Mohit Gupta Coordinator Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims joined as special guests and supported the demands for just, fair and immediate compensation, free and timely medical treatment, rehabilitation, alternate employment and education for the children.

Mark Your Calendar

ANROEV Meeting will be held on September 4-6, 2015 in Hanoi, Vietnam

Members of the Rana Plaza and Tazreen Fashions Accidents Victims Rights Network were present in large numbers at the meeting and narrated their experiences regarding the tragedy and the compensation process. Mrs. Rubi, urged the government and concerned stakeholders to mark 24 April as National Workers Mourning Day and establish a permanent monument at Rana Plaza Site.

An OSHE campaign video on RMG’s Present situation “RMG Growth with Tears” was also screened. Mr. Taherul Islam Taher, Program officer OSHE made a presentation on the status of Rana Plaza Victims: Compensation and Rehabilitation. He said that “more than 1500 children have lost either one or both of their parents in the tragedy, 98 workers are still unidentified”. He urged the government to speed up the process of compensation and
rehabilitation and ensure that the factories in Bangladesh follow all labour regulations.

On April 24, 2015 a human chain was organized at the site of the tragedy in Savar in which more than more than 100 members of the victim’s network participated. A wreath was placed at the temporary memorial at the site. The network members are demanding that brands and retailers should pay for compensation urgently and immediately, ensure workplace safety, free treatment facilities (both long and short term), rehabilitate the survivors and provide them alternate jobs, education of the impacted children, establishment of a special tribunal for speedy delivery of justice

Chairperson of OSHE foundation, Ms. Saki Rezwana urged the government to listen to the voice and demands of the victims and take urgent and immediate steps for their up liftment and to help them lead a life of dignity.

__Chrysotile listing blocked again__

At the close of the Conference of the Parties to the Rotterdam May 15, Russia and Kazakhstan – the world’s biggest asbestos exporters – refused to allow chrysotile asbestos to be put on the Convention’s list of hazardous substances.

These two asbestos exporters were joined by Zimbabwe (which wants to re-open its asbestos mines) and Russia’s ally, Kyrgyzstan. This group of four countries blocked the recommendation of the Convention’s scientific committee and the wishes of the overwhelming majority of countries attending to put chrysotile asbestos on the Convention’s list, which would have required prior informed consent to be obtained before chrysotile asbestos could be exported.

That there will be opposition to the listing was expected, there was a large presence of the pro-asbestos camp at the convention where in a stall was also put up for their propaganda material.

Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, The Russian Federation And Cuba opposed listing. India also opposed listing, but suggested “controlled use” of chrysotile asbestos. Belarus, a non-party, opposed listing. The International Alliance Of Trade Union Organizations “Chrysotile” also opposed listing, arguing instead for controlled use under International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 162. The matter was referred to a contact group for a consensus which could not be arrived at.

Although India had at a previous meeting supported the inclusion of chrysotile asbestos on Annex III of the Convention, they re-joined the asbestos supporters this time round. They must have found it quite uncomfortable to do so in the presence of Mr. Sharad Vittal Sawant, one of their compatriots whose life has been shattered by asbestosis.

In his remarks to the plenary session, Mr. Sawant said: “I am Sharad Vittal Sawant. I come from Bombay, India, I have worked for 40 years at the factory Hindustan Ferodo (now Hindustan Composites), which uses chrysotile asbestos. I am suffering from asbestosis and my wife as well.
Another 400 of my colleagues have been diagnosed as well. I came here to request you to put chrysotile asbestos in the PIC List of the Rotterdam Convention.”

There were several events which took place during the UN convention including a press conference. The event hosted by the asbestos association, had no takers.

You can read more about the convention and the proceedings here May 12, May 13, May 14

Photos – Link 1, Link 2, Link 3

Photo report prepared by Yeyong can be seen here

Some reports on the convention and its outcomes:

- Rotterdam Convention 2015 : chrysotile asbestos will not be included in the list of dangerous products by Hindary Marc, ANDEVA
- Asbestos industry celebrates sabotage of UN Convention – Kathleen Ruff
- Report from the Asbestos Frontline: Update from Geneva - by Laurie Kazan-Allen
- Russia helps block export restriction on asbestos – Nina Larson AFP

[Appeal]Stop Killing Innocent babies and Pregnant Women – Boycott Products by Reckitt Benckiser

In Korea, since 1990s, many families have used humidifier at home and office, especially during dry winter seasons. Families with newborns, children, or old patients are particularly keen to avoid cold and dry airs. At first, the water tank of humidifier was cleaned with water only, mainly by shaking. However, in 1994, the first product labeled as humidifier disinfectant was marketed to humidifier users to be added into the water tank. A survey in 2011 indicated that more than 8 million out of 50 million Korean populations have used around 200,000 different humidifier disinfectant products during winter season.

Since early 2000s, clusters of rare acute interstitial pneumonitis of children were noticed every spring in Korea. The prognosis was quite poor and many of them died. In 2011 April, 7 pregnant women were hospitalized for acute severe respiratory disease of similar nature, and half of them died. Because of possibilities of epidemics and other potential public threats, Korean Center for Disease Control started an investigation in this event. In August 2011, the investigation found the humidifier disinfectant as being responsible for the acute severe lung disease of the victims.

On 11 November 2011, Korean Government released the 2nd and final results of animal experiment, and recalled 6 humidifier disinfectant products from the market nationwide. The Government further recommended not using a dozen of other similar products and asked for voluntary recall.

After the 2011 August announcement of Korean Government, hundreds of cases of similar disease after humidifier disinfectant use have been reported from all over the country to environmental civic organizations as well as Korean CDC. An Investigation committee was formed by Korean government which assessed 530 cases including 140 deaths. Shockingly nearly half of the victims are infants and pregnant women and almost 40% of them are family members.

Exposure investigation found that 12 different humidifier disinfectants had been marketed and many victims had used more than 2 products. Medical investigation found that about 40% of the victims are ‘definite’ or ‘probable’ in terms of the possibilities of terminal bronchiolo-alveolar damages, and the remaining 60% of the victims are ‘possible’ or ‘less likely’. It is guessed that there might be numerous unreported victims nationwide. Additional official registration has been going on till the end of 2015.

In this Government Investigation, 177 victims of the ‘definite’ or ‘probable’ categories had used OXY SSACK SSACK humidifier disinfectant, which is 80% of all 221 cases of ‘definite’ or ‘probable’ categories. In total, 92 victims in ‘definite’ and ‘probable’
categories have already died, and out of them, 71 had used OXY SSACK SSACK brand.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>humidifier disinfectant victims in Korea</th>
<th>patient + death</th>
<th>death only</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>adult + children</td>
<td>children only</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>all brands user</td>
<td>530</td>
<td>236</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reckitt Benckiser user only</td>
<td>424 (80.1%)</td>
<td>189 (80.1%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A petition has been launched demanding that the company take responsibility of its actions and pay compensation to all victims of the disaster. To sign petition [Click here](#).

A protest was held outside the headquarters of Reckitt Benckiser in London on May 19 by the Asian Citizens Centre for Environment and Health, Ban Asbestos Network of Korea with support from all over the world. Some photos of the protest:

- A 9 year old victim child, Narae Kang, with lung fibrosis with background banner saying “Children are dying by humidifier disinfectants” in Korean
- Victim’s protest in front of Westminster, London, United Kingdom.

Candle protest by victims in front of Westminster, symbolizing 142 death penalties who died after using humidifier disinfectant. 100 of 142 death used RB’s product with banner of 142 victims.

To [Read More](#) and [Sign Petition](#)

'Working Women of Asia 2015'

To celebrate the role and contribution of working women in society in general, and in Asia in particular, the Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC) launched a photo contest with the theme 'Working Women of Asia 2015'. The objective of the contest was to make women at work visible.

The Working Women of Asia 2015 was aimed to highlight the invaluable contribution of women to society and their diverse kinds of work. The powerful images below draw our attention to the hard and hazardous work that women workers endure. They form the majority of the informal workers in Asia and are also the most marginalised group of workers making them vulnerable to exploitation.

The initiative started on March 8, 2015, coinciding with the International Working Women’s Day, wherein participants started to submit their entries to the contest and the winners of the photo contest were announced on May 1, 2015, in synch with the celebration of Labor Day. Close to 300 entries were accepted to the photo contest.

Aside from selecting the best 3 photos depicting the role of women and work in Asia, an online voting contest was also launched, named the People’s Choice Award, using Facebook as the platform thereby exposed to a wider audience through social media.
OSHE

South Asian Seminar 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 (AROESP) jointly organised a seminar 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 grassroots 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 demand so 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.

**PPEs Distribution among Construction Workers**

Construction workers are the key factor of the country’s infrastructural development. A good number of workers are involved in construction field. They have been working with huge risk and uncertainty. As a result, they are to experience different sorts of accidents at work. Subsequently, A sub-regional project - “Way out of Informality: Facilitating Formalization of the Informal Economy in South Asia” is being implemented by ILO in Bangladesh to address the decent work deficits in the informal sectors. The Project identified the construction sector for intervention.

OSHE distributed Personal Protective Equipment’s (PPE) with the support of ILO under the project among 50 small construction enterprises in Dhaka, Chittagong and Rajshahi.

**World Day for Safety and Health at Work 2015: National Seminar on Building a Culture of Prevention on Occupational Safety & Health**


Mr. Mikail Shipar, Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Employment was present as chief guest while Mrs. Saki Rezwana, Chairperson of OSHE was moderating the event. Mr. Syed Ahmed, Inspector General (Additional Secretary), Department of Inspection for Factories and Establishments, Mr. Shaha Mohammad Abu Zafor, President, Bangladesh Labour Federation & Coordinator, SKOP and Labour Advisor of Bangladesh Employers’ Federation, Kazi Saifuddin Ahmed attended at the seminar as special guests.

In the program, Mr. Chowdhury Ashiqul Alam, General Secretary, Bangladesh Trade Union Sangha, Secretary General of Bangladesh Labour Foundation Z M Kamrul Anam, Mr. Abul Basher Miah, Director (Engineering and Technical) (Rtd.), BCIC, Engr. Lutful Bari, Safety Specialist (Advisor), Occupational Safety Board of Bangladesh (OSBB), IEB were panel discussants.

Mr. Md. Omar Farque, Assistant Director, OSHE presented key note paper on building a Culture of Prevention on Occupational Safety & Health. He said, as per ILO every year, about 2.3 million people lost their lives at work and in this 2.3 million, about 2 million lost lives due to different occupational diseases. According to OSHE accident survey report from January 01, 2015 to March 31, 2015, about 288 workers lost their lives and injured about 327 workers at workplaces in Bangladesh. He also stated, from 2005 to 2014, 12,260 workers lost lives and 17,183 workers injured at different formal and informal sectors in Bangladesh. In addition, Mr. Farque focused on how government, ILO, workers, owners and OSH specialists can play significant role
together in Building a Culture of Prevention on Occupational Safety & Health in the country.

The Chief Guest Mr. Mikail Shipar stated in his speech, building a culture of prevention on occupational safety & health is an important issue of present time. In fact, accidents usually occur at workplaces due to lack of occupational health and safety measures. The present government is very much serious in this regard. The government took different initiatives for ensuring occupational health and safety at work. As its consequence, the government already placed occupational health and safety policy 2013. In addition, the government enhanced inspection department of factories and establishments and also increased its personnel to 993 from 314 and developed a national inspection work plan.

The Special Guest Mr. Syed Ahmed narrated in his speech, the Inspection for Factories and Establishments Department closed down 32 garments factories due to having poor building safety measures as per the recommendation of review panel. He urged to take help the engineers at the time of constructing any factory buildings. Apart from these, National Health & Safety Council has been working to prepare an occupational health and safety action plan - he added.

Labour Advisor of Bangladesh Employers’ Federation, Kazi Saifuddin Ahmed stated that unsafe work environment increases production cost and spoils the company’s reputation.

Mr. Shaha Mohammad Abu Zafor, President, Bangladesh Labour Federation & Coordinator, SKOP said, “it would not be possible to ensure safe work environment if the right to unionize upholds in the fullest way”. He urged the government to be more pro-active to implement the labour law - 2006.

In an open discussion, the other invaluable discussants asked factories’ owners and the government to undertake effective programs for ensuring workers’ health and safety at work and preventing accidents at factories. We all together will have to be more conscious about the so called & obsolete OSH system at our workplaces in coming days.

**Local Initiative OSH Network (LION)**

Its 2015 already. New Year can mean a new hope for better life and safety working conditions for workers in Indonesia. But New Year can also mean new problem, new challenge, and new cases on OSH reinforcement in here, Indonesia. LION started this year with several activity. Mostly the activity who already started in the middle of 2014.

In January and February, LION finished the asbestos exposure assessment activity from asbestos textile factory in Cibinong, West Java, Indonesia. Along with this activity, we also conducted medical monitoring to the 14 ex workers of this factory, which we believed had ARD potential. From this activity, we found that asbestos exposure level inside the factory are quite high, and from 14 ex workers who get medical examinations, 6 of them shown the abnormality of lung conditions. The full report from this activity still on progress, we will share the report with others as soon as possible.
In the same month also, we finished to compile the report about OSH conditions in garment industries. Collaborative work with several labor union in garment sectors and AMRC Hong Kong, we conducted the field survey research on OSH conditions at one of industrial area in Tangerang, Banten, Indonesia. This research had purposes to find out the OSH conditions in garment, especially the female workers working conditions. The report will compile by AMRC, and also will be published soon.

Still in February, LION together with Humanitarian Benchmark Consulting (HBC) conducted 2015 Indonesia Ban Asbestos Network (Ina Ban) strategic meeting in Tembi, Yogyakarta. This meeting was attended by several organization and person who had concern on development of asbestos issue in Indonesia. This meeting had purposed to reconsolidate the Ina Ban member, and discussed the future of Ina Ban. On this meeting, decided that Ina Ban need to establish as independent organization with own structure and program. But to go there, we need to prepare the organization first. Including the organizational body and resources. For now, LION will continue the role as host organization of Ina Ban, meanwhile other members will prepare the establishment.

In the march, LION had restructured the organizational body. For five years from its establishment, LION was led by Darisman as Director and founder of organization. This year, the LION leadership was replaced by Dimu Pratama, who already became Program Coordinator OSH in LION since 2012. We hope in the hand of new leader, LION can became more active and progressive to spread the safety massage to workers community in Indonesia.

Since December 2014 until March 2014, LION already conducted the mapping activity of working conditions on infrastructure project in Indonesia. This was collaborative work with BWI International and FNV Mondiala. This activity had purposes to identified working and workers conditions in several infrastructure project in Indonesia, such as Tol highway, International Seaport and Airport. From this identification, LION can find out the best strategy to organize OSH issues in this sector. Construction sector always contributed the higher number on occupational accidents. But until now, there are no meaningful efforts yet from government to address this problem. LION decided to get involved and started to organize the workers in infrastructure sectors on labor rights issues, especially Occupational Safety and Health. And near in the future LION will started the initiative on construction workers organizing, to make sure this sector can be in touch with LION safety massages.

Meanwhile in particular conditions LION also actively support the Ministry of Health of Republic Indonesia and Medical academicians from university on several research and training activity about occupational health, mostly on asbestos related disease. From helping technical support on factory exposure assessment until organize several training and workshop activity on knowledge management and capacity building of Ministry of Health field officers in asbestos hazards and asbestos related disease diagnosis.
In this year, LION already started with many OSH awareness campaign with various activity in several sectors of Industry. And it kind felt exhausted for grass roots organizations like us, with very limited supported and very lack of resources. We really hope near in the future, LION can became more better and greater to continue their efforts on support the workers community and union in Indonesia on OSH issues. And LION also will not stop and try to ask from others in International Network to keep supporting us, and helping us to became more better in the future.

PTRC

Silicosis Victims Mourned In Gujarat

International Workers Memorial Day was observed at Khambhat to mourn 25 silicosis victims. This is a new record of numbers of deaths in recent past. Among these 25, there are two pairs of Mother & son. One of the victims Ajay Fakir Machhi was only 16 when he died last October. His mother Ramilaben (40) could not hold back her tears rolling down while garlanding his photo. 10 Year old Sanjay lost his mother last year. He travelled all the way from Navapaura near Anklav to pay homage to her mother. He had lost his father Mukeshbhai in 2011. Ajit Parmar lost his brother and Mother at two month interval during 2014. Among 25, 6 were women and 19 male.

Some 200 workers, widows and concerned citizens attended the program held at Gawara Tower, Khambhat.

A-BAN

A memorial monument for Sennan’s Asbestos victims was unveiled. More than 200 people including local mayors, politicians, legal and medical professionals, citizens, asbestos victims and their families and other supporters gathered. Sugio and Yeyong as representatives from A-BAN were there as guest speakers.

Pictures: http://1drv.ms/1HJ7BJF

SHARPS

The opening ceremony of SHARPS’ new office was held on 14th May. The attendants – the victim family, the activists of SHARPS, the staffs of two movies based on our struggle, the labor attorneys supporting SHARPS, and volunteers, wished this new place can become a base for workers in the electronic industry.

It has been a year since the negotiation between SHARPS and Samsung restarted with the public apology of Samsung on 14th May 2014 as a momentum. The negotiation is under the mediation process now. The mediation body will make its own recommendation on three agenda of negotiation - apology, compensation, and prevention – by the end of June. Samsung’s position has not shown any improvement from its original one which is basically focusing only on compensation of the limited number of victims without any concrete preventive approach. Moreover, the company is trying to put a pressure on the mediation body to prevent “good” recommendation. Samsung’s argument is that the victims need financial support urgently so that the mediation body should make a recommendation on the compensation first. SHARPS also sent its opinion to the mediation body, “Samsung’s suggestion to delay the prevention is very disappointing. Prevention for current workers is as urgent as compensation for the victims. We hope the mediation body to keep its promise to make comprehensive recommendation to address this socially important issue.”

There are two emerging issues of workers’ health in electronic industry; the health problem of
subcontract workers and reproductive health. In the electronic industry, subcontract workers are doing the most dangerous tasks and most of the victims of the fatal chemical accidents are them, just same as in all the other industries. However the employers keep denying their responsibility. Samsung also has refused to include subcontract workers in its compensation. SHARPS is making effort to include subcontractors equally with regular workers in the negotiation agenda of compensation as well as prevention.

In April, Occupational Safety and Health Research Institute of Korean government announced the result of its study showing 215,335 workers in 20,096 workplaces in Korea are at the risk of exposure to the reproductive toxins. Reproductive health is known to be harmed even at much lower level than the exposure limits of chemicals. SHARPS has collected information on various types of reproductive hazards from workers; infertility, spontaneous abortion, and menstrual irregularities. Kim, a worker from Samsung semiconductor factory in Giheung, claimed a workers’ compensation of her infertility to the government in 2013 with support of SHARPS. It was the first claim of reproductive health problem from semiconductor industry in Korea.

SHARPS is working for organizing the movement for right to know of workers and local community. Companies use chemicals without providing any information on the working environment or chemical hazards. Sometimes they just do not know nor check the information because they never concern safety. Even worse, companies conceal or eliminate the information. Workers and people in the local community have been harmed without knowing the cause because they have no right to know. SHARPS is participating a network for chemical safety in Korea. This network has launched the application for smartphone to check the release of toxic chemicals in local community. SHARPS will work with this network to raise awareness of this application and to make the industry disclose more information of chemical usage.

**IOHSAD**

The Institute for Occupational Health and Safety Development (www.IOHSAD.org) conducted a survey on the reproductive health and sexual harassment issues of women workers in the electronics sector. The IOHSAD staff, together with the enumerators, interviewed 200 women workers about their reproductive health conditions, hazards in the workplace, sexual harassment cases and the labor unions’ response to these issues. The actual survey was completed in April and the final report is set to be released within the year. This research survey is a joint project with the Asia Monitor Resource Centre.

IOHSAD, together with the illegally dismissed workers of Golden Fortune Techno Built Inc., remembered all the construction workers who have died due to work in a program held last April 28 to mark this year’s Worker’s Memorial Day. The Philippine construction industry is considered as one of the most hazardous sector for workers. It has contributed a significant number of occupational accidents in recent years which claimed the lives of more than 40 construction workers. In January 2011, 10 construction workers of Eton Properties died due to violations of safety standards. Four years after, another tragic accident occurred in a construction site in Bulacan which claimed the lives of 11 people. Both investigations made by Labor Department showed major lapses and non-compliance of the contractors to occupational health and safety standards.

IOHSAD, together with other labor organizations are actively pushing for the criminalization of occupational health and safety standards violations in the Philippines. The provisions of House Bill 4635 or Worker’s SHIELD (Safety and Health Inspection and Employer’s Liability Decree), sponsored by Rep. Emmi de Jesus and Rep. Luz Ilagan of Gabriela Women’s Partylist, are being discussed by members of the Committee on Labor and Employment and other stakeholders. If the law is approved, employers who are proven guilty will not only pay penalties to the state but will be meted out
appropriate criminal obligations based on the gravity of their violation.

Violations of occupational health and safety standards committed by the management of Kentex Manufacturing, Inc. a slippers factory in Valenzuela City caused the death of more than 72 workers last May 13. IOHSAD together with other labor organizations conducted a fact finding mission within 24 hours after the fire incident occurred. The FFM team was able to gather information from survivors and families of workers who perished in the fire. The results of the FFM showed gross violations on occupational safety particularly on fire protection, control and proper handling, labeling and storage of chemical inside the workplace committed by the Kentex Management. At present, IOHSAD is actively organizing and supporting the families of the victims and survivors as they fight for justice for their loved ones and their right to work.

**IBAS**

Throughout the first quarter of 2015, the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS) progressed discussions with colleagues in India and Africa regarding asbestos outreach projects to raise public awareness, identify and support asbestos-affected individuals and contribute to the debate regarding the listing of chrysotile asbestos under the framework of the UN’S Rotterdam Convention. Grants were awarded for some of this work with decisions pending on the rest. Key graphics were updated for use by ban asbestos activists and clarification was sought regarding asbestos anomalies with data showing asbestos-cement exports from India, reported by Mohit Gupta, being delivered to the Italian authorities. As a result of this collaboration, legal proceedings have been instituted by a Turin prosecutor over these illegal shipments [Read Kazan-Allen L. Italy’s Asbestos Mystery! Jan, 2015.]

**Hesperian Health Guides**

After more than a decade of work, involving many individuals and groups in the ANROEV network, we are happy to announce that Workers’ Guide to Health and Safety was finally published on May 1st, 2015.

Workers’ Guide to Health and Safety is an easy to use, fully illustrated resource that brings forward the issues that most affect factory workers, from poverty wages and violence to chemicals and ergonomic injuries. This book provides the tools to change those conditions. Whether you are a worker, educator, health promoter, union organizer, or employer, we can all take action to create safer, healthier, fairer, and more fulfilling workplaces. The *Workers’ Guide* is relevant in all factory settings, with a focus on garment, electronics, and shoe factories. Easy to use and full of illustrations, this new titles demystified occupational safety and health, making it accessible to everyone.

Contents include:

- How to recognize workplace dangers caused by chemicals, machines, and more.
- Practical solutions to common workplace problems.
- How to be a workers’ health promoter, and ideas for training.
- Activities and stories from workers themselves.
- How to fight violence, gender discrimination, abuse of migrant workers, and low wages, which all affect workers’ health.
- Work-related information on first aid, nutrition, mental health, family planning, and how to avoid HIV, TB, and other diseases.
“Hesperian’s new publication is an excellent resource in helping workers achieve safe and dignified jobs...full of innovative and sustainable ways for workers, employers, and consumers to make that right a reality.” —Guy Ryder, Director-General, International Labour Organization


If you have any inquiries, please reach out to workersbook@hesperian.org.

**International Workers Memorial Day**

Lots of events reports and photographs now in from Australia, as International Workers’ Memorial Day started its journey across the globe. Make sure we see yours – add #iwmd15 to your tweets. See our related resources: [www.28april.org](http://www.28april.org); [www.cancerhazards.org](http://www.cancerhazards.org); [ITUC occupational health and safety](http://www.ituc.org)

**Some photos**

 Former RCA employees win decade-long legal battle

BIG PAYOUT? The RCA Self-Help Association had sought damages of NT$2.7 billion, but the court said General Electric was not to blame and awarded NT$564 million

Former employees of Radio Corp of America (RCA) burst into tears as a court yesterday ordered that
the now-defunct electronics company and its owners pay NT$564.45 million (US$18.11 million) in damages to 445 former workers and their families. With pink banners around their foreheads saying “RCA workers never give up,” about 60 members of the RCA Self-Help Association cheered their victory after the Taipei District Court handed down the ruling on the decade-long legal battle in what has been described as the worst industrial disaster in the nation’s history.

“During my time at RCA, we were often exposed to organic solvents. No one knew whether the substances were hazardous to our health,” said Huang Chun-tiao (黃春窈), 56, who was diagnosed with nasopharyngeal cancer after working at RCA for 18 years.

According to the verdict, the defendants asserted that the plaintiff had failed to prove that the health issues resulted from exposure to environmental factors, but judges opined that the causal relationship could be determined with “a reasonable degree of medical certainty” to be the toxicity of the organic solvents.

RCA operated in Taiwan from 1970 to 1992, with plants in then-Taoyuan County, Hsinchu County, and Yilan County, employing tens of thousands of people in the production of color TVs and other electronics products using up to 31 kinds of organic solvent, including trichloroethylene and tetrachloroethene, exposure to which increases the risk of cancer, the verdict said.

In 1998, the Environmental Protection Administration (EPA) found that the site of the former RCA plant in Taoyuan was contaminated with chlorinated organic solvents and other toxic chemicals used in its production after the company had illegally dug wells to discharge the toxic waste, which contaminated tap water used by its workers and nearby residents.

The 7.2 heactare plant has been designated by the EPA as a site of “permanent contamination.”

During the period between 1992 when RCA shut down its plants in Taiwan and 2004 when 519 members of the association filed the civil lawsuit, more than 1,300 of RCA’s former employees have been diagnosed with various types of cancer, with 221 of them dying, the verdict said.

A year after the takeover of RCA by General Electric (GE) in 1986, the firm was sold to Thomson Consumer Electronics, the US subsidiary of France-based Thomson Multimedia, which is now called Technicolor SA.

The RCA Self-Help Association had sought damages of NT$2.7 billion from RCA, GE and Thomson, but the court absolved GE of any blame, a decision over which Joseph Lin (林永釗), the lead lawyer for the association, expressed regret. Lin thanked the judges for determining that the effects of the pollutants caused the diseases, a rare decision in a Taiwanese case. The defendants have the right to appeal the Taipei District Court’s verdict. Staff writer, with CAN, Read More

**IOHSAD Statement on the Kentex Fire Tragedy**

Violations of occupational health and safety standards committed by the management of Kentex Manufacturing, Inc. caused the death of the workers in the deadly fire in Valenzuela City last Wednesday. A total of 72 workers died and several others are still missing. It should be noted that 69 workers met their death in the second floor of the building.
Based on accounts of the workers who survived the fire tragedy and as seen in the appearance of the burned structure, occupational safety standards were clearly violated. The management of Kentex Manufacturing did not comply with major provisions of Rule 1940 or the Fire Protection and Control Rule 1940 of the Occupational Safety and Health Standards of 1989.

A. Absence of proper fire exits in the building.
   This is a clear violation of the provisions of Rule 1943.03 which state:
   
   (1) At least two exits shall be provided in every floor and basement of every workplace capable of clearing the work area in five (5) minutes.
   
   (6) On every floor, except the ground floor, one of the exits shall lead to an inside stairway or a smoke proof tower, while the other exits shall lead to inside stairways, smoke-proof towers or horizontal exits.

A) Kentex workers who survived the factory fire said that containers of newly-delivered flammable chemicals were not stored properly and were placed in the vicinity where the welding was being done. This is a clear violation of the provisions of Rule 1943.07 on storage:

   (1) Significant quantities of commodities with fire hazards greater than ordinary combustible commodities shall be separated from the main bulk by fire walls.

A) Kentex workers claimed that there were no recent fire drills done in the workplace. This is a clear violation of Rule 1948.03:

   (1) Fire-exit drills shall be conducted at least twice a year to maintain an orderly evacuation of buildings, unless the local fire department requires a higher frequency of fire drills.

According to the statement released by Department of Labor and Employment Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz, “Kentex Manufacturing has been found to be compliant with general labor standards and occupational safety and health standards after a joint assessment by our Labor Laws Compliance Officers under the new Labor Laws Compliance System”. The tragic death of the 72 Kentex workers is more than enough proof that the labor laws compliance inspection being implemented by the DOLE is erroneous, unreliable and questionable.

The Labor Department has continuously bragged about the new Labor Laws Compliance System being implemented since 2013 as “one of its kind” and that the Philippines is “one of the first to adopt the innovative approach for improving compliance with labor laws”. Workplace accidents and workers’ deaths show the exact opposite of DOLE’s boastful claims. Since its implementation, major workplace accidents including the fire tragedy in Kentex factory have occurred: (a) fire tragedy in Asiatech warehouse in Pasay in 2014 (8 female workers dead), (b) collapse of building in a warehouse construction in Bulacan in Januay 2015 (12 dead) ; (c) construction site accident in BGC in February 2015 (2 dead).

The new Labor Laws Compliance System being implemented by the DOLE is contained in Department Order 131-13 which aims to “inculcate and foster a culture of voluntary compliance, where there is less government intervention, and there is more workers’ and employers’ active participation in the plant-level.” This “tripartite” approach to labor laws compliance particularly on occupational safety standards has resulted in more injuries and deaths among workers and employers’ continuous violations of OHS standards. Workers’ lives, health and safety should not be anchored in the trust given by the Labor Department to company managements. Employers cannot be expected to voluntarily comply and report their violations of safety standards.

We call for the mandatory, strict and frequent safety inspection by the Labor Department of all establishments. The inspection should be done through unannounced visits of labor inspectors to prevent companies from concealing safety standards violations. Results of the inspection should be published immediately and must be
presented and approved by the general assembly of workers.

We condemn the Labor Department’s silence and lack of concrete steps to make the employers accountable for the lives of the Kentex workers. Claims and promises of “social and labor justice” to be given to the workers are grave insults to the grieving families who seek justice for their loved ones.

We call on the Labor Department to immediately release the results of the inspections done on Kentex Manufacturing, investigate the labor laws compliance officer (LLCO) who performed the inspection and most especially file concrete criminal charges against the Kentex management.

We reiterate our call for the immediate passage of House Bill 4635 or Worker’s SHIELD (Safety and Health Inspection and Employer’s Liability Decree) that seeks the Labor Department’s mandatory inspection of all establishments and the criminalization of violations of OHS standards. The criminalization of OHS violations will definitely contribute to pushing companies to comply with health and safety laws. If the law is approved, employers who are proven guilty will not only pay penalties to the state but will be meted out appropriate criminal obligations based on the gravity of their violation.

We call on the government to resolutely act and put an end to the continuous neglect of our workers’ right to life. We appeal to all legislators to immediately pass House Bill 4635 and shield our workers from unsafe working conditions and deadly occupational hazards.

- Prosecute the owners of Kentex Manufacturing Inc.!
- Justice for Kentex workers!
- Criminalize Violations of OHS Standards!
- Pass House Bill 4635 or Worker’s SHIELD!
- Safe working conditions for Filipino workers!

List Chrysotile Asbestos in PIC List
Ban Asbestos NOW!

A series of Press conferences were held in Mumbai, Delhi and Ahmedabad to highlight the issue regarding Asbestos in the country and to urge the government of India to take the steps in the right direction.

Victims and Activists urge the Indian Government to Ban all forms of asbestos and allow listing of chrysotile asbestos as a hazardous substance at an upcoming UN meeting

In a press conference held today, Victims of Asbestos related disorders, activists, doctors among others called on the Government to institute a mechanism for immediate and urgent ban on all forms of asbestos in the country along with listing of Chrysotile Asbestos as a hazardous substance at the upcoming Rotterdam convention to be held next month in Geneva.

Considering the public health disaster caused by Asbestos, 55 countries have banned any use of asbestos. India has placed a ban on mining of all forms of asbestos and the National Green Tribunal has also asked for status reports from Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change regarding scientific closure of all asbestos mines in the country.

However, the country continues to import large quantities of fibres from countries like Russia, Brazil and Kazakhstan. Imports have risen from 253,382 tonnes in 2006 to 473,240 tonnes in 2012. “This vast amount of asbestos, being placed in homes and schools across India, are a deadly time bomb that will go on causing suffering and deaths for decade to come,” said Dr V Murlidhar, Pneumoconiosis Compensation Board, Turner & Newall Trust.

On March 23, 2015 dozens of prestigious scientific organizations and scientists from around the world issued a Statement calling on the Government of India to withdraw a discredited scientific study on Chrysotile (white) Asbestos carried out by NIOH and to stop blocking the listing of Chrysotile Asbestos as a hazardous substance at an upcoming UN meeting.
“The study has no scientific credibility,” states Dr. Philip Landrigan, President of the Collegium Ramazzini and Dean for Global Health, Icahn School of Medicine, Mount Sinai, New York. “It is flawed in the design, methodology and interpretation of the results.”

The criteria for selection of workers for the study exposes a deliberate attempt by NIOH to ‘not’ find cases of asbestos related illnesses. For instance, no retired workers were selected for the study or some workers who had worked only for 5 years were chosen for the study thereby defying the logic /concept of ‘healthy worker effect’ which is universally accepted to do such studies.

While there is no systematic monitoring and reporting of asbestos related diseases (ARD) in India, even then 225 cases of mesothelioma, a rare form of cancer found in people exposed to all forms of asbestos fibres, has been reported by the Indian cancer registry, the Gujarat Cancer Institute and the Tata Cancer Institute. Independent studies in Mumbai, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand of former asbestos product manufacturing factory/mine workers have identified over 800 cases of asbestosis, most of whom have also been compensated for contracting ARD due to work related exposure. New data being collected by independent health organisations show diseases amongst family members of workers due to secondary and environmental exposures. Several legal cases are pending in labour and civil courts in Gujarat, Maharashtra and Rajasthan.

“My life is in ruins because of asbestos. My chest feels like burning”, said Mr Naran Mehra, suffering from Asbestosis. “I can walk barely 100 metres before I have to stop and rest” said Mr Chinnapan who used to work with an Asbestos Cement Roof sheet company and is suffering from Asbestosis. Mr Shirgaokar from Mumbai said “I got wages for giving my labour to the company but the company also took away my health”

Mr. Ramesh Vats, President of Mahanagar Asangathit Mazdoor Union and also Former President of the Union at the Delhi Transport Corporation stated “While the whole world is progressively moving towards banning Asbestos, in striking contrast India has been increasing imports of the deadly Chrysotile Asbestos, despite it being acknowledged as a known carcinogen responsible for nearly 107,000 deaths each year by the WHO. We urge the Indian Government not to turn a blind eye towards the long-term hazards related to Asbestos usage and exposure”.

We therefore request Government of India to

1. Withdraw the NIOH study, which does not hold up to any credible scientific scrutiny
2. Enable listing of Chrysotile asbestos in the UN hazardous substances list in the upcoming Conference in May 2015, so that the trading countries have a prior knowledge about the health implications of Chrysotile asbestos before importing it.
3. Place a ban on all forms of asbestos in the country.
4. Undertake a survey of all workers (current and former) of factories and mines using asbestos fibres to comprehensively identify victims of asbestos related diseases.
5. Institute a framework to identify / use alternate products to replace asbestos
6. Ensure adequate capacity of doctors and hospitals in the country to diagnose workers suffering from Asbestos related disorders

Release Date - 30 April, 2015
Scientists around the world call on Government of India to withdraw discredited study on chrysotile asbestos and stop blocking UN Convention

Dozens of prestigious scientific organizations and scientists from around the world have issued a Statement calling on the Government of India to withdraw a discredited scientific study on chrysotile (white) asbestos and to stop blocking the listing of chrysotile asbestos as a hazardous substance at an upcoming UN meeting.

The ‘Study of Health Hazards / Environmental hazards resulting from use of Chrysotile variety of Asbestos in the country’, carried out by the National Institute of Occupational Health (India), states that it found no evidence that chrysotile asbestos is causing harm to health of workers in India. The Government is using the study as the reason why it will oppose the listing of chrysotile asbestos under the Rotterdam Convention at a UN conference in Geneva in May. The Convention sets safety standards to promote responsible trade in hazardous substances.

“The study has no scientific credibility,” states Dr. Philip Landrigan, President of the Collegium Ramazzini and Dean for Global Health, Icahn School of Medicine, Mount Sinai, New York. “It is flawed in the design, methodology and interpretation of the results.”

Photos in the study show some workers wearing a cotton scarf tied around their face as their only “safety equipment”. The study also shows workers weaving asbestos cloth. This is one of the most hazardous uses of asbestos.

Kathleen Ruff, RightOnCanada.ca, Mon, Mar 23, 2015 Read More

NGOs from around the globe deliver “Challenge” to electronics industry on toxic chemicals

NGO’s today delivered a formal challenge to the electronics industry to take action to stop the harm to workers and communities caused by hazardous chemicals used to manufacture electronic products. The Challenge, endorsed by over 200 labor, environmental, public health and community organizations in 40 countries, was presented by a representative from Good Electronics to a meeting in Brussels of the Electronics Industry Citizenship Coalition (EICC), a trade association created to help the industry address environmental, human rights and “social” problems in its supply chain.

The EICC’s “Code of Conduct” that addresses environmental, labor, and health and safety issues, is pretty weak. But its biggest problem is that the EICC system relies upon occasional audits to enforce conformance to this code of conduct. There is plenty of evidence, including a 2014 ICAR report called “Turning A Blind Eye,” that this kind of occasional audit system simply doesn’t work when it comes to the kinds of supply chain issues occurring in the global economy that places manufacturing in
developing countries with low wages, weak laws, weak enforcement, and high incentives for corruption. Business for Social Responsibility came to the same conclusion back in 2007 in its Beyond Monitoring report. In fact, at a January 2015 meeting between EICC and membership groups from both ICRT, and Good Electronics, industry representatives stated that problems of cancer and deaths from hazardous chemicals doesn’t even show up as a problem in its audits. Clearly, there is a major disconnect between what’s really happening, and what the occasional audit program can see.

The problem of chemical harm from electronics manufacturing is not new to this industry that uses many highly powerful solvents, acids, and other highly toxic chemicals. After the supposedly “clean” semiconductor industry came to Silicon Valley, hundreds of cases have emerged of workplace exposure causing harm to workers and their children and to nearby residents who were exposed to contaminated drinking water polluted by chemicals from electronics factories.

But these problems continue today, now spread to the various countries where the electronics industry now manufactures its products. Civil society organizations report hundreds of cases of electronics production workers who have fallen ill over the past five years in China, South Korea, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand and elsewhere, from exposure to benzene and other highly toxic chemicals used in manufacturing.

Just a few examples:

**Leukemia at two Samsung plants in Korea**
Supporters for Health and Rights of People in the Semiconductor Industry (SHARPS), a worker rights group in South Korea, has documented a total of 193 workers who developed cancers or other illnesses at various Samsung plants in Korea, 73 of whom died. Victims and families of workers who died have been challenging Samsung in court to compensate them for the illnesses and deaths. Last year, Samsung finally issued an apology to the families, and agreed to provide some compensation, but fell short of admitting any responsibility for the illnesses.

SHARPS has also identified another 50 victims at other (non-Samsung) semiconductor plants in Korea, 19 of whom have died.

**Workers at RCA plant in Taiwan**
Workers at the now-closed plant of RCA in Taoyuan County, Taiwan, say that toxic chemicals caused nearly 1000 cancer cases, and 157 deaths. Following a long legal battle in a lawsuit filed by former workers, a Taipei court is expected to issue a ruling in this case in April 2015.

**Benzene poisoning**
In June, Dutch research center SOMO will publish a report together with Labour Action China (LAC) on benzene poisoning in the electronics industry in China.

**Areas for Action**
The Challenge was developed by members of two global NGO networks: Good Electronics and the International Campaign for Responsible Technology (ICRT), to which the Electronics TakeBack Coalition belongs. The document challenges the industry to take action in six key areas:

**Be transparent.** Provide full materials disclosure to workers, communities, and the general public, including what chemicals are being used and discharged, and what hazards to the environment and humans (including reproductive hazards) are known to be associated with the chemicals.

**Use safer chemicals.** Assess hazardous materials used in manufacturing throughout the product lifecycle and replace them with safer alternatives. Where the environmental or human health effects of a substance are unknown, its use shall be avoided; where it is inadequately or incompletely characterized, the precautionary principle shall apply until all relevant hazard testing is available.

**Protect Workers.** Develop and implement, jointly with affected and other interested workers and their organizations, comprehensive hazard monitoring for all workplaces and workers throughout the product
lifecycle. This includes training, capacity building, and industrial monitoring as well as monitoring to measure exposures and health surveillance to identify and prevent diseases. Workers shall be able to negotiate over hazardous working conditions and refuse hazardous work without fear of retaliation.

**Guarantee participation.** Respect efforts of workers and communities to participate in the sound management of chemicals and wastes in their workplaces and communities. This includes the development of effective worker health and safety committees and training programs.

**Protect communities and the environment.** Prevent harm throughout the product lifecycle. Conduct effective, transparent, independent monitoring of all discharge streams. Eliminate hazardous discharges to air, waterways, and land.

**Compensate and remediate for harm to people and environment.** Develop and fund mechanisms that ensure that workers (present and former, and their families) or communities harmed by exposure to hazardous chemicals receive emergency relief and just compensation. Develop funding mechanisms to ensure environmental and workplace remediation for as long as is needed to address the harm.

Read the full text of the challenge [here](http://bit.ly/1NYMJ3O).


by Barbara Kyle | March 16th, 2015, [Read More](http://bit.ly/1NYMJ3O)

The challenge was drafted as a result of a meeting in January 2015 in San Francisco, California

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**Paraquat in India: too big a risk for farmers and workers**

Press Release by PAN India, IUF, PAN Asia and the Pacific, Berne Declaration

A new report published today shows that the herbicide paraquat is widely used under high-risk conditions in India. The report finds that rules and recommendations for paraquat use are often ignored, that users don’t have the required information, nor do they have the means to protect themselves from exposure. All of this violates the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management.

The victims are farmers and workers who are suffering from numerous adverse health effects caused by paraquat. The report’s publishers are therefore calling for paraquat to be included on a list (under the Rotterdam Convention) which allows governments much more control over its importation. Such a listing, say the publishers, would support developing countries to make an informed decision on allowing or not the importation of paraquat.

“Conditions of Paraquat Use in India” published by the IUF, Pesticide Action Network (PAN) Asia and the Pacific, PAN India and the Berne Declaration, shows the shocking reality about the use of paraquat in India. This highly hazardous herbicide is already banned in many countries around the world, including African and Asian countries, the European Union, and Switzerland, the home country of Syngenta, the main producer of paraquat. Nevertheless, it is still one of the world’s most widely used herbicides, especially in developing countries, where its use leads to the poisoning of countless workers and farmers.

The data, collected across six states in India, revealed that:

- paraquat is sold in plastic carrying bags
- even when it is sold in proper containers, many users can’t read the labels
- contrary to recommended use instructions, users mix it with other ingredients

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Group Photo from the San Francisco meeting
users apply it with leaking knapsack sprayers and use it on crops that the herbicide is not approved for.

personal protective equipment is nearly non-existent.

These practices increase exposure and the risk to human health. As a result, farmers and workers suffer from headaches, vomiting, burning sensations, breathing difficulty, muscle pain and/or abdominal discomfort. Chronic exposure can lead to lung, brain or skin damage.

Paraquat is being used on about 25 crops (in the study area) while the Central Insecticide Board & Registration Committee (CIBRC) of India has approved its use on only nine crops. Furthermore, manufacturers of paraquat (including the main manufacturer Syngenta) have recommended its use on crops not approved by the CIBRC; this is in violation of the Indian Insecticides Act. The study also shows that the use of paraquat in India violates the International Code of Conduct on Pesticide Management; and under the Code manufacturers, distributors and relevant authorities have a duty to change this untenable situation.

The report: “Conditions of Paraquat Use in India” can be downloaded at: Click Here

Compensation to Silicosis Victims in India

Compensation to families of 4 Silicosis victims in Panna, India

Next of Kins of 4 silicosis victims in Panna, Madhya Pradesh were handed over cheques for INR 300,000 after an order by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC). NHRC had held that the state government is responsible for failing in its duties to protect the health of its citizens and not ensuring that the labour laws are implemented correctly.

Guararat labour court orders cent per cent payment of compensation to deadly silicosis victims

In a judgment of considerable significance for those suffering from the deadly occupational disease, silicosis, in Gujarat, the labour court in Vadodara has asked the Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC) -- a Government of India undertaking “tailored” to provide health-related protection to workers -- to pay up compensation to nine surviving victims who were diagnosed of the disease in 2007. A year after they were diagnosed of the disease while working in agate units in Godhra district of Gujarat, Vadodara-based People’s Training and Research Centre (PTRC) helped victims of silicosis file a petition against ESIC for compensation (“disablement benefit” in legal terms). As many as 15 persons agreed. Of these 15, for whom the petition was filed with the help of the NGO, six died before the judgment was delivered. Nine of them are now entitled to get the “disability benefit”.

A PTRC note said, “For the rest of nine cases, the labour court passed order in their favour ordering ESIC to pay benefit to them starting with 2007.” Pointing out that the case was “built from scratch, as the victims did not know for themselves whether they were insured under the ESIC, under the ESI Act, as they did not have any evidence of employment”, PTRC said, “We filed several RTI applications to recover documentary evidence.” Read More

13 families receive letter of compensation from Gujarat Government
Government of Gujarat sent letters intimating families of 13 victims of Silicosis regarding sanctioning of INR 100,000 as compensation. Cheques will be disbursed soon. However, the other 47 applicants were rejected.

**Barely 3 out of 10 victims qualify for Samsung’s Compensation plan standards**

Hankyoreh21, a weekly magazine of South Korea, analyzed the compensation standards that Samsung had proposed in the mediation process to address workers’ death and health problems.

According to Hankyoreh21’s analysis, only 14 people (8.5%) of the 163 victims absolutely met Samsung’s compensation standards. If a variety of provisory clauses that Samsung presented is applied, 107 people (65.7%) are automatically excluded from compensation.

Article written by Hankyoreh21 has been translated into English. The original article can be read [here](#)

“Challenge” is Samsung’s keyword for 2015. On January 19th, at the Samsung Group new board members’ banquet dinner held at the Shilla Hotel, Samsung Electronics Vice President Lee Jae-Yong proposed a toast with the words “Let’s continue to take more challenges this year.” At the opening ceremony on January 2nd, Samsung Electronics Vice President Kwon Oh-Hyun emphasized that this was the first year of “New Challenges, Restart.”

There are many hidden meanings behind the word “challenge.” While to some extent it means Samsung Electronics should try harder to make up for its recent poor economic reports, it also emphasizes the “new” Samsung as it begins its first year having Vice President Lee solely in charge since President Lee Kun-Hee collapsed.

(Translator’s note: note that Lee Jae-Yong, the new Samsung Electronics Vice President, is the son of Lee Kun-Hee, President of Samsung Group).

But the shadow of Lee Kun-Hee’s regime still lingers. The enactment of the ‘Lee Hak-Soo Act’ is being pushed within parliament. The SDS stocks of VP Lee and his siblings may be recognized as illegal profit and confiscated by the government. VP Lee’s pockets were filled with trillions with the listing of Samsung SDS and Jael Fabric on the stock exchange. But due to Samsung’s unfair inheritance of wealth, social antagonism against it increased just as much. Employees who were discarded in the process of reorganizing business for the new “Lee Jae-Yong regime” began a strike to stop the sale of the company, arguing that they had been sacrificed for Lee’s succession.

Samsung hastens to erase this shadow in order to secure social justification for three generations of inheritance. On January 16th, Samsung revealed its compensation standards for occupational victims of Samsung Electronics, which is perhaps another challenge for Samsung. But Samsung acknowledges only a few out of the group of victims as ‘its family’.

Hankyoreh21 analyzed 166 cases of Samsung occupational victims according to the standard that Samsung provides. We found that barely 3 out of 10 people qualify to receive Samsung’s compensation according to the company’s proposal.

Is Lee Jae-yong’s Samsung regime ready to depart from its old past? The back tide of a river can only keep flowing by pushing away what’s in front of it.

**Read More**

**Saving the Employees’ State Insurance Scheme**

In his 2015–16 budget speech Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley while acknowledging that the Employees’ State Insurance Scheme (ESIS) is not functioning well and is riddled with problems said, “With respect to ESI, the employee should have the option of choosing either ESI or a health insurance product, recognised by the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority (IRDA). We intend to bring amending legislation in this regard, after stakeholder consultation.”

This is a clear attempt at destroying an otherwise excellent health security system and links to the boost in the budget for the insurance sector by increasing substantially the tax rebate for payment of insurance premiums from Rs 15,000 to Rs 25,000 and Rs 30,000 for senior citizens. The latter is also a message for the aam
aadmi(common man) to take care of his/her health needs by buying health insurance. The government does not intend to provide it. Thus we also see a huge cut in healthcare budgetary allocations from Rs 39,231 crore to Rs 33,260 crore, a sharp decline of 15%, actually much more in real terms if we factor in inflation.

The Employees’ State Insurance Corporation (ESIC), created by an act of Parliament in 1948, is the most important social health insurance programme for the organised sector working classes. It has an annual budget of over Rs 10,000 crore and reserve funds of more than Rs 25,000 crore. With 151 hospitals, 32,349 hospital beds, 20,346 medical personnel (7,340 doctors) and 18,501 other staff, and with a per insured employee medical spend of Rs 2,551 it is a huge medical establishment, somewhat similar to the armed forces (38,328 beds and Rs 5,914 crore medical expenditure of Rs 19,713 per employee) and the railways (13,963 beds and Rs 1,370 crore medical expenditure with Rs 9,660 per employee). Table 1 (p 18) details the ESIC expenditures over the last five years.

The ESIS is not an ideally functioning social health insurance programme. It looks huge in numbers with a coverage of 6.18 crore beneficiaries with a per capita expenditure of Rs 1,557 in 2013–14 which is over 50% more than what general government health expenditure is for the same year. But this does not spell universal access even for the organised sector employees; in fact it covers only 42% of the covered organised sector employment and by design it is largely targeted at blue collar workers thus fragmenting social security even in this sector. The salary ceiling of less than Rs 15,000 per month is a discriminatory practice as it burdens this class of low income workers with statutory payroll deductions whereas the middle and upper echelons of the workers and management cadre do not have to make such a contribution. This is certainly against the principle of equity and perhaps violates the fundamental right to equality. Read More

ITUC Pledge on Toxics: “If you expose us, we’ll expose you”

Occupational cancers kill at a rate of more than once a minute worldwide, according to a comprehensive review of the available evidence by the ITUC.

The global union body, speaking out ahead of the 28 April International Workers’ Memorial Day, says this preventable waste of life must end and has a stern warning for rogue employers: “If you expose us, we’ll expose you.”

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said, “Even conservative estimates put the annual occupational cancer toll at 660,000 deaths a year. A poisonous cocktail of toxic marketing and regulatory failure has already condemned another generation to an early grave.”

“As long as there’s money to be made, industry will retain its fatal attachment to some of the most potent killers in history,” Burrow notes. “For example, next month it is all but certain that just enough governments will dance to the asbestos industry’s tune to keep chrysotile asbestos off the toxic exports list included in a key United Nations treaty.”

“This is a typical example of an industry protecting its markets without regard to the human consequences. Global asbestos production is not falling, and in some countries, including India, Indonesia and Brazil, consumption has increased.”

Benzene is another industry favourite with over half a century of evidence establishing a clear cancer link. Yet the biggest names in petrochemicals – British Petroleum (BP), Chevron, ConocoPhillips, ExxonMobil and Shell Chemical – all contributed to major study that ran through most of the last decade, designed to head off cancer compensation
claims and to protect their valuable product from tighter regulation.

“Wherever stricter controls are proposed, industry representatives or their hired guns appear, challenging the science and predicting an economic catastrophe,” Burrow says. “Whether it is silica or diesel exhaust, dyes or metals, or the endocrine-disrupting chemicals linked to breast cancers and reproductive problems, alternatives are not being used and controls are not being employed or adequately enforced.”

This year on 28 April, the international campaign day when unions pledge to “remember the dead, and fight for the living”, the harm caused by workplace toxins is being put under the spotlight. A new ITUC guide, ‘Toxic work – stop deadly exposures today’, sets out how to remove toxic exposures from the workplace. At the centre of the union strategy is active, union-supported workforce participation, in finding problems and implementing solutions.

According to Burrow: “There is nothing inevitable about exposure to toxins at work. Over 40 countries, including all those in the European Union, function without asbestos with no negative impacts. Why shouldn’t workers in India, Brazil or Sri Lanka be afforded the same protection, the same respect for their health?

“Some of the world’s most profitable companies are not just defending their toxic products, they are defending weak exposure standards that mean they profit and you pay. It is not ethical, it is not healthy and it is not what we bargained for. We make this pledge: if they expose us, we will expose them.”

• Statistics are included in a new ITUC-supported workplace cancer website, www.cancerhazards.org, which provides union representatives and others with the latest news on occupational cancer, including emerging scientific evidence and union initiatives to combat occupational causes of cancer.

• Online campaign resources are available: ITUC occupational health and safety and 28 April activities. ‘Toxic work – stop deadly exposures today’.

27 April 2015, Read More

National Green Tribunal asks MoEF to submit list of asbestos mines across country

NEW DELHI: The National Green Tribunal has directed the Environment Ministry (MoEF) and Indian Bureau of Mines to submit a complete list of asbestos mines in the entire country with their status.

A bench headed by Justice U D Salvi directed MoEF and the Bureau to inform about the present status of the mines, specifically with regard to their scientific closure and produce complete records in relation to it.

"The MoEF and Indian Bureau of Mines shall file list of asbestos mines located in the entire country and their present status, particularly as regards scientific closure of such mines.... Asbestos mining not only gives rise to asbestos related cancer but also to the asbestosis.

"Even if the asbestos mining activity has been closed, scientific closure of such mines remains in question. Odisha is directed to answer whether the asbestos mines in the state have been scientifically closed or not, and further answer whether there have been cases of asbestosis," the bench said.

The Tribunal also directed the state governments of Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Jharkhand government to file a report regarding scientific closure of the asbestos mines and the instances of asbestosis in the states.

The matter is listed for next hearing on April 16. Perturbed by illegal and unscientific asbestos mining across the country, the Tribunal had earlier pulled up the Environment Ministry for providing a “vague and uncertain” response in its affidavit.

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. Read More
Dying to Breathe—A Short Film Shows China’s True Cost of Gold

Each time I arrived in Hongjun village after a 12-hour journey by plane, bus, and motorbike, I took deep breaths of the crisp mountain air—as if that could clean out my Beijing-polluted lungs.

It did not take long for the irony to hit me. This alpine landscape in central China is home to hundreds—perhaps thousands—of men too sick to breathe normally.

Once farmers, these men left en masse in the late 1990s to work in gold mines—part of the army of migrant workers who powered China’s economic boom in recent decades. They dug deep into the mountains for treasures. Years later, they came back with the lung disease silicosis, and now wait in their homes for death.

For years, I’ve been a regular visitor to one of those former gold miners: a man named He Quangui, who lives in an old earthen house with his wife, Mi Shixiu. Mr. He has been struggling with silicosis for over ten years—surviving longer than most in his area. He keeps a notebook to record the names of those who’ve succumbed to silicosis.

A shadow of his former self, He Quangui once weighed 143 pounds and is now a skeletal 88 pounds. It is tradition in rural China that a person die in their own home. Photo - Sim Chi Yin

This is the unseen cost of gold mining in China—the world’s top gold producer. In China, silicosis is considered a form of pneumoconiosis, which affects an estimated six million workers who toil in gold, coal, or silver mines or in stone-cutting factories. It’s the country’s most prevalent occupational disease.

What the statistics can’t capture are the miners’ slow deaths. The men waste away, their lungs gradually scarring or becoming hardened from the dust they breathed years earlier. The disease is irreversible—a lung transplant is the only known cure—but is preventable with protective gear and ventilation while drilling. Mr. He says the type of mines he worked in lacked such safety measures.

Read More

New report: Mind the gap

How the global brands are not doing enough to ensure a dignified life for workers in the garment and electronics industry in India.

This report is a joint effort of Future in Our Hands (Framtiden i våre hender), Norway and Civil Initiatives for Development and Peace (Cividep), India, both civil society organizations working for fair distribution of wealth globally through respect for the rights of workers and communities. The study compares working conditions and wages in two different global supply chains that cater to the European market with links to South India - the garment industry in Bangalore that produces apparel for well-known European retailers including H&M, a Swedish multinational, and Norwegian Varner Group as also the electronics industry in Sriperumbudur (near Chennai) where electronics companies Dell and Samsung (USA and Korea respectively) are manufacturing their products.

By - Framtiden i våre hender and Cividep Mar 17, 2015. Download the report here: Mind the Gap
Nokia company profile reveals: workers' rights systematically disregarded

On the day before Nokia’s shareholder meeting in Helsinki, Finland, the GoodElectronics Network is publishing a company profile narrating nearly two decades of the rise, fall, and resurrection of this Finnish electronics company. The profile reads as an alternative corporate history from a workers’ perspective. It turns out that workers’ interests never played a role of significance for Nokia, despite it being one of the world’s most successful electronics companies ever. Now that Nokia has taken over Alcatel-Lucent and is back in business, it’s high time for Nokia to start taking workers’ rights seriously.

The report, jointly drafted by SOMO, CEREAL-Mexico and Cividep-India, analyses the adverse impacts of Nokia’s varying business strategies on the rights of Nokia workers between 1998 and 2014. A particular emphasis is put on the lives of Nokia workers in Reynosa (Mexico) and Sriperumbudur (India).

Bad working conditions during Nokia’s ‘good times’

Nokia’s golden years (1998-2007) were characterised by a rush for the cheapest production locations. Workers in Nokia’s own factories and in those of Nokia’s suppliers faced poor employment and working conditions, as well as structural job insecurity and recurrent job losses due to Nokia continuously shifting production to countries with ever lower wages.

Huge bonuses for investors and management during ‘bad times’

When Nokia was eventually taken over by Microsoft in 2014, thousands of workers lost their jobs amongst others because production was shifted away from India to Vietnam. In the meantime, the proceeds from the Microsoft-Nokia deal were used to pay premiums to investors and bonuses to management (5.44 billion dollar).

Pauline Overeem (GoodElectronics Network) “With the recent takeover of Alcatel-Lucent, Nokia is becoming the largest supplier of network equipment (such as masts) that connect mobile phones, tablets and computers. We hope this next phase for Nokia will be one in which labour rights are truly respected.”

Jasoon Chełat (Cividep,India): "The Nokia plant in Sriperumbudur was projected as one of the most significant instances of big-league company investing in a Special Economic Zone in India. Although the first signs of trouble in Nokia’s presence in Sriperumbudur is often cited as tax issues with the Government, a closer look into its operations brings to the fore a lack of regard for labour rights." Read the report

Regional News

Comic Book Receives Sunflower Price

The comic book on Hwang Yumi’s story and struggle of her father got the 19th Sunflower Price for the most environmentalist comic of the year in France.

Read article in French

Alarming testimonies of workers in the Mexican electronics industry

Paying the price for flexibility

Restriction of freedom of association, lack of collective negotiations, wages below the official poverty line; Mexican labour group Centro de Reflexión y Acción Laboral (CEREAL) has researched working conditions in the electronics industry in Mexico in the context of recent labour law reform. The companies that are portrayed in the report include IBM, Jabil, Foxconn, Sanmina SCI, and Microsoft.

The electronics industry in Mexico is formed by over 800 companies that specialise in the assembly and manufacturing of electronic brand-name consumer products. To this day, the main contribution of Mexican workers to this industry is their cheap labour. Mexico appeals to international electronics brands as an attractive destination for investment due to the low production costs. The vast majority of the hundreds of thousands of Mexicans that work
in electronics factories are modest, anonymous and unorganised workers. They have no say whatsoever in the management of the factories they work in. CEREAL judges that this situation contributes to a wide range of labour problems. Besides, and as a consequence of, the restriction of the freedom of association and the lack of collective negotiations, wages are very low. Electronics workers and their families often live below the official poverty line. Workers are not free to decide over working day or night shifts.

Background- Mexican labour group CEREAL, one of the four project partners in the EC-funded GoodElectronics programme, provides support and legal advice to workers in the electronics industry. For the past years, CEREAL has documented labour rights conditions in this industry. This report is the 6th of its kind. For the first time, a rating of corporate compliance with labour rights is included, based on an evaluation drawing on international human rights standards. Most of the interviews were undertaken in Guadalajara in the context of legal advice sessions in Cereal's office. Other interviews were done in Mexicali, Tijuana and Reynosa. CEREAL made work of checking facts through additional visits and interviews. CERAL also used a questionnaire covering several issues, such as working hours, salary, benefits, type of contract, chemicals used in the workplace. A draft of the report was sent for review to the companies that feature in the report. Sanmina, Jabil and IBM gave feedback. Their response is included in the report. The other companies did not react.

CEREAL has gathered workers’ testimonies that provide a snapshot picture of how the lives of electronics workers actually look like. One such story is Ruth’s. Ruth has a son with a disability who requires special care. Sometimes Ruth’s employer forces her to work the night shift, even if she doesn’t have anyone to look after her son. Ruth told CEREAL: “The problem is that they want to arrange our rest days and vacations as it suits them. (...) Sometimes we, as mothers, need days to take our children to the doctor or deal with matters at their school and we ask for days from our vacation or ask for them in advance, like they do, or we propose the possibility of making up the hours in another shift, and but they usually don’t let us.”

Report: ‘Paying the price for flexibility - workers’ experiences in the electronics industry in Mexico’

A breath test for malignant mesothelioma using an electronic nose

Malignant mesothelioma (MM) is a rare tumour which is difficult to diagnose in its early stages. Earlier detection of MM could potentially improve survival. Exhaled breath sampling of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) using a carbon polymer array (CPA) electronic nose recognises specific breath profiles characteristic of different diseases, and can distinguish between patients with lung cancer and controls. With MM, the potential confounding effect of other asbestos-related diseases (ARDs) needs to be considered. We hypothesised that as CPA electronic nose would distinguish patients with MM, patients with benign ARDs, and controls with high sensitivity and specificity.

20 MM, 18 ARD and 42 control subjects participated in a cross-sectional, case–control study. Breath samples were analysed using the Cyranose 320 (Smiths Detection, Pasadena, CA, USA), using canonical discriminant analysis and principal component reduction.

10 MM subjects created the training set. Smell prints from 10 new MM patients were distinguished from control subjects with an accuracy of 95%. Patients
with MM, ARDs and control subjects were correctly identified in 88% of cases.

Exhaled breath VOC profiling can accurately distinguish between patients with MM, ARDs and controls using a CPA electronic nose. This could eventually translate into a screening tool for high-risk populations.

Asbestos was extensively used worldwide over the last two centuries and exposure still continues in many countries. Asbestos exposure can lead to one of the more aggressive forms of cancer, malignant mesothelioma (MM), as well as lung cancer [1]. The World Health Organization estimates that globally 90,000 people die from asbestos-related disease (ARD) each year [2]. Asbestos-associated mortality and morbidity have been predicted to rise, and to peak within the next 5 yrs. This is likely to occur even in countries where asbestos usage has been banned because of the long latency period for disease development [3].

The pathophysiological mechanisms that result in the development of malignant disease are rapidly being elucidated [4] due to developments in the understanding of basic mechanisms. Currently, however, there is no method for predicting which asbestos-exposed individuals will develop malignancy [5]. Read More

**Epidemiological patterns of asbestos exposure and spatial clusters of incident cases of malignant mesothelioma from the Italian national registry**

**Background**

Previous ecological spatial studies of malignant mesothelioma cases, mostly based on mortality data, lack reliable data on individual exposure to asbestos, thus failing to assess the contribution of different occupational and environmental sources in the determination of risk excess in specific areas. This study aims to identify territorial clusters of malignant mesothelioma through a Bayesian spatial analysis and to characterize them by the integrated use of asbestos exposure information retrieved from the Italian national mesothelioma registry (ReNaM).

**Methods**

In the period 1993 to 2008, 15,322 incident cases of all-site malignant mesothelioma were recorded and 11,852 occupational, residential and familial histories were obtained by individual interviews. Observed cases were assigned to the municipality of residence at the time of diagnosis and compared to those expected based on the age-specific rates of the respective geographical area. A spatial cluster analysis was performed for each area applying a Bayesian hierarchical model. Information about modalities and economic sectors of asbestos exposure was analyzed for each cluster.

**Results**

Thirty-two clusters of malignant mesothelioma were identified and characterized using the exposure data. Asbestos cement manufacturing industries and shipbuilding and repair facilities represented the main sources of asbestos exposure, but a major contribution to asbestos exposure was also provided by sectors with no direct use of asbestos, such as non-asbestos textile industries, metal engineering and construction. A high proportion of cases with environmental exposure was found in clusters where asbestos cement plants were located or a natural source of asbestos (or asbestos-like) fibers was identifiable. Differences in type and sources of exposure can also explain the varying percentage of cases occurring in women among clusters.

**Conclusions**

Our study demonstrates shared exposure patterns in territorial clusters of malignant mesothelioma due to single or multiple industrial sources, with major implications for public health policies, health surveillance, compensation procedures and site remediation programs. Read More

**New ugly propaganda from the asbestos lobby**

The International Chrysotile Association (ICA), the lobby organisation for the global asbestos industry, has produced two new propaganda booklets as part of its efforts to sabotage the upcoming Rotterdam

The booklets display either gross ignorance or gross deliberate deception. They hide the fact that the Convention’s committee of scientists from around the world (the Chemical Review Committee) has recommended that chrysotile asbestos be put on the Convention’s list of hazardous substances (Annex III of the Convention), that Parties to the Convention have already agreed that the listing of chrysotile asbestos meets all the criteria of the Convention, and that a tiny handful of asbestos selling and asbestos industry allied countries, led by Canada in the past and today by Russia, have repeatedly blocked the scientific committee’s recommendation, arousing the ire of the rest of the world. Instead, in these booklets, the ICA launches an ugly, bullying attack on the Convention’s staff and is trying to destroy the recommendation of the Chemical Review Committee.

These tactics reveal a level of desperation on the part of the asbestos lobby.

Fri, Apr 17, 2015, Kathleen Ruff, RightOnCanada.ca, Read More

At least one in three Europeans can be exposed to asbestos at work and in the environment

About one third of the 900 million people in the WHO European Region live in countries that have not yet banned the use of all forms of asbestos, and this potentially exposes them at work and in the environment. In countries where asbestos is banned, exposure persists from past use. Exposure to asbestos can cause cancer of the lungs, ovaries and larynx; mesothelioma; and asbestosis and the most efficient way to eliminate these diseases is to stop the use of all types of asbestos. At its closure, the high-level meeting on environment and health in Haifa, Israel, urgently calls upon all European countries to eliminate asbestos-related diseases.

"We cannot afford losing almost 15 000 lives a year in Europe, especially workers, from diseases caused by exposure to asbestos. Every death from asbestos-related diseases is avoidable," says Dr Zsuzsanna Jakab, WHO Regional Director for Europe. "We urge all countries to leave the Haifa meeting to fulfil their 2010 commitment and develop policies by the end of this year that will eliminate asbestos-related diseases from the face of Europe. There is very little time left for that."

Elimination of asbestos-related diseases was one of the major issues discussed at the Haifa meeting. Over 200 representatives of European countries and international and nongovernmental organizations attended the meeting to evaluate overall progress on environment and health in Europe.

Copenhagen and Haifa, Amended on 1 May 2015

Read More

Supreme Court upholds Kubota liability in asbestos death case

The Supreme Court has upheld a ruling that found asbestos used at a Kubota Corp. plant caused fatal mesothelioma in a man who lived near the plant and ordered the company to pay ¥31.9 million in damages to his relatives.

It’s the first time the Supreme Court has upheld a lower court decision recognizing corporate responsibility for asbestos-related illness in someone living near a factory.

All five judges on the court’s Third Petty Bench, led by Justice Takehiko Otani, upheld the ruling Tuesday, court officials said.

The plaintiffs were relatives of Kojiro Yamauchi, who died at age 80 after working for two decades about 200 meters from the Kubota plant in Amagasaki, Hyogo Prefecture.

He lived near his workplace.

His relatives and those of Ayako Yasui, who died at age 85 having lived about 1 km from the plant, sought damages from both Kubota and the government.
The Kobe District Court ruled in August 2012 that asbestos fibers had spread outside the plant, ordering Kubota to pay damages to Yamauchi’s family, but not Yasui’s. The decision was later upheld by the Osaka High Court, and now by the Supreme Court.

The government was not liable, the lower courts ruled, because not enough was known about the risk to nearby residents to implement regulations.

Kubota has offered compensation to residents since 2005, but it has denied there is any link between local illnesses and fibers from the plant. The plaintiffs in the Supreme Court case did not receive the compensation.

Last October, the Supreme Court ruled that the government was responsible for failing to protect workers from exposure at asbestos factories in Sennan, Osaka Prefecture.

Former construction workers from around the country have also filed lawsuits in connection with asbestos-linked illnesses. Read More

Protesters block Colombo-Puttalam road at Anawilundawa

A protest launched by villagers against the construction of an asbestos manufacturing factory at Anawilundawa yesterday, brought traffic on the Colombo- Puttalam A-3 road to a standstill for nearly an hour.

Villagers claimed the factory would have ill-effects on the health condition of the community and that water sources could be polluted. They added the setting up of the factory would adversely affect the bio-diversity of the Anawilundawa bird sanctuary.

Meanwhile environmental organizations stated the factory would use more than 165,000 liters of water daily to meet production requirements.

Convener of the protest -Ven. Wilpotha Pemananda Thera- accused that the Director of the Provincial Environment Authority of not taking into account the ill-effects on the village community nor on the world famous Anawilundawa wetland when giving approval for the construction of the factory.

With protesters blocking the road, police were forced to divert traffic on alternate routes.

With protesters blocking the road a few politicians began holding discussions with the factory owners. Demonstrators called off the protest when factory owners said they would halt construction.

ASP Chilaw arranged a discussion between the factory management and the protesters. Read More

Asbestos Trading through the European Community

When more than 50 delegates from European trade unions and NGO's met at Brussels in June 2011 concern was expressed about asbestos from Canada being trans-shipped in European ports and sent on to the developing world; this set into motion research into the global asbestos trade in asbestos.

As a result, a database was created on nearly 1,500 companies known to be involved in the asbestos trade passing through the USA; from the company profiles it is possible to identify thousands of shipments made since 2007. The database is now being extended to show shipments between many other nations.

Canada may have dominated world trade for many years but nowadays it is the Russian Federation and former Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan that are the global masters. The Russian asbestos industry, worth $800m a year, employs 400,000 people producing around half the world output (around 1
million tonnes a year); though the world’s third largest consumer of asbestos it exports three-quarters of its output.

Russia is a major trading partner of the European Community and since 2007 its exports of all commodities into the EU has risen on average each year by 8%. In the last quarter of 2011 its imports into Europe were valued at €49.8m (11.8% of all the community imports), but with the community exporting just €29.4m (7.3% of all exports) to Russia the trade balance is greatly in Russia’s favour.

Last year the Russians were pivotal in frustrating efforts by the WHO to adopt measures to prevent future asbestos related diseases (ARDs). They are lamentable in recording the incidence of ARDs. Despite having key hotspots such as Asbest, a city of 70,000 people and the home of the world’s largest asbestos producer, Uralasbest (known as “the dying city” for its high rates of ARDs), and already having mesothelioma deaths arising among dock workers in relatively newly built ports, there is virtually no information available to the populace and asbestos usage remains a normal part of everyday life in the eastern bloc.

The Russian based International Chrysotile Alliance of Trade Union Organisation was part of an industry assault on UN proposals to impose a modicum of regulation on the global trading of asbestos. Russia’s chief health officer has declared over 3,000 asbestos-containing products safe. From such standpoints the Russians can be expected to continue strongly protecting their asbestos trade.

At Geneva in December 2011 Russia came to an agreement with the European Community to use its “best efforts not to introduce or increase export duties” on those commodities for which it holds a world dominance of 10% and more – it produces more than half of the world output of asbestos. The letter of agreement signed off by Poland’s deputy prime minister and the EU trade commissioner was published in the Official Journal of the EU on February 29th, 2012. It has asbestos and crocidolite asbestos listed in the schedule (asbestos products are excluded since the agreement relates to raw materials). This will do nothing to hinder the trade into and through Europe.

Read More by Bill Lawrence

Landmark asbestos award upheld by Court of Appeal

BHP Billiton Ltd has failed in its appeal against a decision to award a record $2.2 million in damages to a mesothelioma sufferer.

The NSW Court of Appeal yesterday found the Dust Diseases Tribunal correctly ruled that BHPB breached its duty of care to the former employee in failing to take practical measures to reduce his and others’ risk of asbestos exposure.

The decision follows BHPB’s failed appeal against a mesothelioma award in South Australia recently

The NSW case involved Steven Dunning, now 54, who was exposed to asbestos while working as a labourer in the blast furnace department at BHPB’s Newcastle Steelworks between 1979 and 1981.

He was diagnosed with terminal cancer a number of years ago, and sued BHPB for damages.

As reported by OHS Alert last year, the Tribunal found BHPB exposed Dunning to lethal levels of asbestos, which caused his disease, and ordered it to pay him $2,236,959 in damages.

Judge Bill Kearns found there were a number of practical steps BHPB could have taken to reduce workers’ risk of asbestos exposure, including:

- providing them with respiratory protective devices and insisting they wear them, which BHPB didn’t do;
- telling workers they were “at risk of contracting an incurable disease that, if contracted, would prove fatal and probably within about 18 months of contracting it”;
- requiring vacuum cleaners be used for cleaning the blast furnace;
- banning the use of compressed air in cleaning up processes;
- undertaking atmospheric testing; and
ensuring clothing was laundered daily and waste was properly sealed and disposed of.

BHPB appealed, arguing Judge Kearns erred in finding it breached its duty of care to Dunning on the basis that it knew there was "some unquantifiable risk from exposure to asbestos and that there were 'practicable' alternative measures to reduce such risk".

It said "the failure to eliminate a risk that [is] reasonably foreseeable and preventable is not necessarily negligence".

The employer argued that Judge Kearns failed to recognise that some risks might be "acceptable", and that a reasonable person in its position might not consider the risk as needing a response, "whether because of the unlikelihood of the risk coming to pass, the impracticability of eliminating it or other reasons".

It also argued that Judge Kearns wrongly assumed it would have breached its duty of care unless there was "zero" risk to the worker.

But Court of Appeal Justices Robert Macfarlan, John Basten and Roderick Meagher found that if the Judge had considered the issue as suggested by BHPB, then he would not have referred to steps the organisation could have taken to reduce the risk.

Justice Macfarlan said Judge Kearns "implicitly recognised that there could be some risks to which a reasonable person would not respond, for example, if there were no 'practical alternative measures' by which the risk could be reduced or eliminated".

"[Judge Kearns] did not assume that to avoid a breach of duty, BHP had to reduce the risk to zero," he said.

"Plainly the 'practical alternative measures... would not have reduced the risk to zero.

"Those measures, if implemented, would have reduced the risk by a substantial margin, but not so as to eliminate the risk altogether."

Slater and Gordon asbestos lawyer Joanne Wade, whose firm represented the worker, said the Court's decision was "extremely welcome and significant".

"BHP has been fighting this case for nearly five years, pursuing every legal avenue available to them. To have this case now concluded is a relief to the Dunning family," she said. Read Judgement here

Asbestos imports rising in Canada despite health warnings

Despite rising fears of asbestos-related illnesses, imports of products containing asbestos show little sign of slowing.

According to Statistics Canada figures, imports of asbestos-related items rose to $6-million last year from $4.9-million in 2013. The bulk of these goods consisted of asbestos brake linings and pads, which hit $3.6-million in imports in 2014, a seven-year high. Other imports included raw asbestos, friction materials and some items containing crocidolite, which is considered the most dangerous form of asbestos.

The dollar amounts may not seem like a lot of money given Canada's overall trade, but in terms of brake pads that translates into hundreds of thousands entering the Canadian market each year. The World Health Organization and other agencies have said that all forms of asbestos are carcinogenic and the best way to eliminate asbestos-related diseases is to stop using it.

Asbestos is by far the top on-the-job killer in Canada, accounting for almost 5,000 death claims since 1996. Many victims die of mesothelioma, asbestosis and lung cancer, though it may take 20 to 50 years after exposures to materialize. And yet Canada continues to allow imports and exports of asbestos, unlike other dozens of countries such as Australia, Japan, Sweden and Britain, which have imposed a ban.

Canada has imported more than $100-million in asbestos brake pad and linings in the past decade. In total, more than $250-million in imports of asbestos and asbestos-containing products entered the country between 2004 and 2014. Canada was also one of the world's largest exporters of asbestos, though raw shipments stopped in 2011 after the last
mines closed. Last year, this country exported $1.8-million worth of asbestos products.

A key concern about the brake pads centres on mechanics, who often use air hoses to clean car parts while replacing them, putting dangerous dust in the air. In the past decade, 61 claims for the deaths of auto, truck and bus mechanics stemming from asbestos-related diseases have been approved, according to the Association of Workers’ Compensation Boards of Canada.

TAVIA GRANT, Read More

Comic Book on “Asbestos and Earthquake”
The Kyoto Seika University has published a comic book on “asbestos and Earthquake” in three languages

- Press release (Japanese)
- Japanese version
- Korean version
- Chinese version

Illegally Traded and Dumped E-Waste Worth up to $19 Billion Annually Poses Risks to Health, Deprives Countries of Resources, Says UNEP report Tue, May 12, 2015

Inconsistency in Cross-Border Regulations Challenge to Effective Control of Illegal Waste Trafficking

Geneva, 12 May 2015 - Up to 90 per cent of the world’s electronic waste, worth nearly US $19 billion, is illegally traded or dumped each year, according to a report released today by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP).

Each year, the electronic industry - one of the world's largest and fastest growing - generates up to 41 million tonnes of e-waste from goods such as computers and smart phones. Forecasts say that figure may reach 50 million tonnes already by 2017. A staggering 60-90 per cent of this waste is illegally traded or dumped, according to UNEP's "Waste Crimes, Waste Risks: Gaps and Challenges In the Waste Sector", launched today in Geneva, at the Conference of Parties to the three major conventions addressing the global waste issue, the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions.

Photo Credit: baselactionnetwork cc

The International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) estimates the price of a tonne of e-waste at around US $500. Following this calculation, the value of unregistered and informally handled, including illegally traded and dumped e-waste ranges from US $12.5 to US $18.8 billion annually.

UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UNEP, Achim Steiner said: "We are witnessing an unprecedented amount of electronic waste rolling out over the world. Not only does it account for a large portion of the world's non-recycled »waste mountain«, but it also poses a growing threat to human health and the environment, due to the hazardous elements it contains."

"Through enhanced international cooperation and legislative coherence, stronger national regulations and enforcement, as well as greater awareness and robust prevention measures we can ensure that the illegal trade and dumping of e-waste is brought to an end. This will create a win-win situation, whereby rare and expensive elements are safely recycled and reused, boosting the formal economy, depriving criminals of income and reducing health risks to the public," he added.

Innovative solutions to combat illegal and unsustainable handling of e-waste are emerging. Recovering valuable metals and other resources locked inside electronic products, for example, can reduce the amount of e-waste produced, diminishing pressure on the environment, creating jobs and generating income.
The growing volumes of e-waste, municipal waste, food waste, discarded chemicals and counterfeit pesticides, all contribute to increasing pressure on the environment. The report also points to the fact that every year, roughly one third of the food produced for human consumption globally - approximately 1.3 billion tonnes, worth over US $1 trillion - is lost or wasted.

The global waste market - from collection to recycling - is estimated to be worth US $410 billion a year, generating jobs and incomes. As with any large economic sector, it creates opportunities for illegal activities at various stages of the waste chain. Concentrated on making profit, operators are prone to ignore waste regulations and expose workers to toxic chemicals. On a larger scale, organized crime may engage in tax fraud and money laundering, as volumes handled go largely unregistered, allowing for substantial under and over reporting.

Apple wants to be entirely carbon neutral... one day

Apple wants to create enough renewable energy to power its entire global business, including its supply chain. Chief executive Tim Cook claimed it would take Apple "years" to realise the goal but said it had to happen.

"Apple's goal is to achieve a net-zero impact on the world's supply of sustainable virgin fibre and power all its operations worldwide on 100 percent renewable energy," it said in a statement.

The firm already generates enough renewable energy to power 87 percent of energy use in its stores, offices and data centres, but that figure doesn't include the supply chain. Apple said its supply chain uses 60 times as much power as its own operations.

"This won't happen overnight -- in fact it will take years," added Tim Cook in a press release. "But it's important work that has to happen. It is a responsibility we accept." Cook has previously told Apple investors who disagree with its renewable energy plans to "get out of the stock".

Apple has previously been criticised for the environmental impact of its supply chain, most of which is based in China; regulators in China were said to be investigating two Apple suppliers for toxic dumping in 2013, amid other accusations of dumping by industrial partners.

The expansion of Apple's renewable energy project to China will include all its manufacturing facilities, although Apple has set no timeline as to when it will be carbon neutral in the country. A focus on renewable energy also won't eliminate issues around toxic dumping. The use of toxic materials in the manufacturing of phones, tablets and laptops is an issue the industry is yet to fully confront.

Apple has already started work on its first major solar installation in China and plans to build two 20-megawatt solar power farms. A facility in Sichuan Province will generate enough energy to power all of Apple's offices and retail stories in the country. Leftover energy, enough to power 61,000 Chinese homes, will be added to the grid.

11 MAY 15 by James Temperton, Read More

Analyzing Labor Conditions of Pegatron and Foxconn: Apple’s Low-Cost Reality

NEW YORK - China Labor Watch (CLW) published a new report that investigates labor costs and conditions at two major Apple supplier manufacturers, Pegatron (Shanghai) and Foxconn (Longhua).

Ever since Foxconn's labor costs increased in 2010, Apple has been more greatly engaging lower cost suppliers like Pegatron, which gain their competitive edge through lower labor cost, leading to poorer labor conditions.

Although Apple claims they have strict internal auditing of supplier labor conditions, our investigation and analysis found that labor conditions at major suppliers are still substandard. Workers still do overtime far in excess of even Apple's own standard. Under this competition structure, suppliers that improve labor conditions...
are at a disadvantage. Apple is the major beneficiary of this supply chain structure. Below is the summary of the report. The full English and Chinese report versions, with charts, graphs, and raw data, can also be found here in CLW's report database.

1. Apple consistently suppresses labor costs by shifting production to cheaper manufacturers
   - While Apple earns huge profits, labor costs are relatively low.
   - Apple shifted production orders from Foxconn to cheaper Pegatron in order to offset Foxconn’s rising labor costs.
   - In 2014, Pegatron Shanghai still possessed about an 8% cost advantage over Foxconn Longhua, translating into a $61 million annual advantage at just one of many Pegatron factories that service Apple.

2. Apple is unable to effectively monitor its supply chain; Pegatron still has excessive working hours
   - Apple constantly claims that it is monitoring suppliers’ compliance with Apple labor standards.
   - Research of Pegatron workers’ pay stubs reveals average of 60+ working hours per week, 52% of workers completed more than 90 hours of overtime per month, even working as many as 132 hours of overtime.
   - Workers desire overtime because their base wages are too low; base wages cannot meet the local living standard.

3. It is media attention that has improved labor conditions, not Apple’s self-monitoring
   - Media reports in 2010 and 2012 influenced changes in Foxconn’s labor conditions.
   - Apple responded to the reports by hiring a third-party organization to improve public relations, though important promises remain unfilled.

4. Apple must take more responsibility for improving labor conditions
   - Apple has sufficient profits to improve workers’ treatment.
   - Apple executives make public commitments to workers, yet poor labor conditions remain unresolved.
   - Earning three-fifths of the profit in the industry, and with $178 b in cash reserves, if Apple doesn’t reform labor conditions, who will?

About China Labor Watch: Founded in 2000, China Labor Watch is an independent not-for-profit organization. For more than a decade, CLW has collaborated with labor organizations and the media to conduct in-depth assessments of factories in China that produce toys, bikes, shoes, furniture, clothing, and electronics for some of the world’s largest brand companies. CLW’s New York office creates reports from these investigations, educates the international community on supply chain labor issues, and pressures corporations to improve conditions for workers. Read More

Quarter of traffic police officers have poor lung function

In a health camp organised for Traffic police personnel on Wednesday, to check for chest and lung diseases, doctors who conducted the tests said around 25 per cent of the personnel had problems in their lung function.

The camp — a collaboration between the Delhi Traffic police and doctors of BLK super-speciality hospital — saw 160 traffic police personnel being screened at Todapur traffic police headquarters in West Delhi. The personnel underwent spirometry tests, blood pressure and ECG tests, besides consultations with physicians.

Dr Vikas Maurya, senior consultant in respiratory medicine at the hospital, said, “Spirometry or lung function tests showed anomalies in around 25 per
cent of those tested. Most of them complained of symptoms like shortness of breath, wheezing, tightness or pain in the chest, chronic cough and disturbed sleeping due to cough or wheezing. Around 25 per cent showed symptoms of respiratory allergies that were triggered specifically by dust. These personnel have been exposed to air pollution for long hours, which plays a definite role in these findings.”

Ten personnel showed severe symptoms and have been advised to undergo further tests, including chest x-rays and detailed lung function tests, Dr Maurya said. He said these symptoms could be early indicators of respiratory disorders like asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorders (COPD).

Traffic police authorities said the findings had been communicated to them, and they are now taking measures to ensure that health of traffic police is monitored regularly.

Express News Service | New Delhi | Published on: May 8, 2015 2:41 am

Vincent releases ‘cancer village’ list on conclusion of project’s first phase

Vietnamese environmental protection authorities have just released a list of pollution-linked “cancer villages” upon the conclusion of a project’s initial phase.

The first phase of a project which focuses on identifying the causes behind disease and locating safe water resources in 37 “cancer villages” across Vietnam has been completed.

“Cancer villages” are where there is an alarmingly high concentration of water pollution and people suffer from numerous infectious diseases and cancer.

The project was launched by the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment. Its second phase is awaiting permission to proceed.

The water sources in the villages, found in 22 different cities and provinces across the country, are seriously polluted.

Those with the most tainted water sources are located in Hanoi’s Ung Hoa and Chuong My districts; Bac Ninh’s Yen Phong District; and Thanh Hoa’s Nong Cong in the north; Nghe An’s Dien Chau District; Ha Tinh’s Loc Ha District; Quang Ngai’s Binh Son District; and Binh Dinh’s Hoai Nhon District in the central region, according to the project’s findings.

The findings also revealed that there have been 1,136 deaths from cancer in these villages over the past few years. 380 people from communes in the vicinity have also died of cancer.

Dr. Ho Minh Tho, the project’s overseer, observed that Thach Khe Village in Lam Thao District in the northern province of Phu Tho had the most fatalities of all, with 139 villagers perishing from the deadly disease.

TUOI TRE NEWS, UPDATED: 02/02/2015, Read More

10 workers killed in Ranipet tannery

In the worst tannery disaster in Tamil Nadu, 10 workers were drowned in toxic sludge in the early hours of Saturday at a tannery unit in the Small Industries Development Corporation (SIDCO) Industrial Estate in Ranipet.

Breach in wall

The flood, caused by a breach in the concrete wall of the sludge storage tank of the adjacent Common Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP), caught the workers who were asleep, unawares.

Nine of the dead were from Paschim Medinipur district, police said. They were identified as Abeeb Khan and his two sons Ali Akbar and Ali Ankar of Vidyapur Saltawani; Shajahan and Kutub Khan (brothers); Akram, Eshyam, Pyar and Habeeb, all from Balrampur. G. Sampath of Melvallam, the watchman at the unit, was also killed.

Two other employees, K. Ravi (50), a supervisor and G. Aminul Ali Khan (21) of Balrampur were rescued by fellow workers.

The Tamil Nadu Pollution Control Board (TNPCB) has ordered the closure of the CETP, run by the Ranipet SIDCO Finished Leather Effluent Treatment
Company Limited, as well as 79 member-units linked to it, for not following safety norms.

Case registered

P.K. Senthil Kumari, Superintendent of Police, Vellore district told The Hindu that a case has been registered against the company under sections 337 (causing hurt by act endangering life or personal safety of others), 285 (negligent conduct with respect to fire or combustible matter) and 304 (ii) (causing death by negligence) of the IPC. Read More

Roof Collapse Kills Workers in Bangladeshi Cement Factory

NEW DELHI — The roof of a cement factory collapsed Thursday afternoon in the southwestern Bangladeshi city of Mongla, killing at least six people and leaving scores more in the wreckage, a government safety official said.

Around 40 people were rescued in the first hours after the roof collapsed, but as night fell, as many as 70 remained trapped in the collapsed structure, said Mahboob ul-Allam, senior assistant secretary in Bangladesh’s disaster management department. Part of the factory, which is run by the army and located about 200 miles from Dhaka, the capital, was under construction, he said.

Two years ago, a similar collapse focused global attention on unsafe conditions in Bangladesh’s garment industry, which handles orders for many of the world’s top brands and retailers. More than 1,000 people were killed in that collapse, which a government report attributed to substandard construction materials and blatant disregard for building codes.

By Ellen Barry MARCH 12, 2015, Read More

China paraxylene chemical plant hit by explosion

An explosion has ripped through a chemical plant in south-eastern China’s Fujian province, sparking a major fire.

The blast occurred on Monday evening at the plant in Zhangzhou. Six people were taken to hospital, say officials.

State news agency Xinhua said 177 fire engines and more than 800 firefighters were sent to the blaze, which is now under control.

The plant produces the chemical paraxylene (PX), in a process many in China feel creates harmful pollution.

PX is a flammable chemical used in polyester and plastics manufacturing.

Construction of PX plants has sparked protests, including violent demonstrations last year in Guangdong province.

Xinhua said Monday's blast occurred at about 19:00 local time (11:00 GMT) in a pumping station, after leaking oil caught fire.

People living up to 50km (31 miles) away reported feeling a tremor from the explosion, and windows at a petrol station 1km (0.6 miles) from the plant were blown out, Xinhua said. Nearby residents were evacuated. Read More

U.S. Waste Disposal in Afghanistan: Unused Incinerators and Open-Air Burn Pits

In spite of an $80-million investment in building incinerators for hazardous waste disposal in Afghanistan, the U.S. military left many of them unused, resulting in increased use of open-air burn pits whose dangerous fumes put thousands of soldiers and civilians at risk.

The repeated use by the U.S. military of burn pits to dispose of solid and hazardous wastes—from batteries, plastics and aerosol cans to tires and entire vehicles—was one of the foulest stories to come out of the Afghanistan war. The practice produced acrid smoke and exposed tens of thousands of soldiers and civilian personnel to toxic fumes that have been linked to serious health problems, including cancer, cardiopulmonary diseases and reduced lung function.

To address the problem and reduce exposure to military personnel, the Department of Defense(DOD) invested $81 million on 23 solid waste incineration systems for nine installations in Afghanistan. But at four military bases, eight of the
incinerators either weren't used or only partially used, according to an investigation (pdf) by John Sopko, the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR).

The four installations visited by SIGAR staff from 2012 to 2014 revealed serious mechanical problems with the costly incinerators, including leaking hydraulic lines, rusted equipment, and missing insulation. One operating base received its incinerators from the contractor two years late and, before even being used, requiring $1 million in repair work. Read More

**Notes from the Field: Silicosis in a Countertop Fabricator — Texas, 2014**

In May 2014, the Texas Department of State Health Services was notified of a case of silicosis with progressive massive fibrosis in a Hispanic male aged 37 years who worked for an engineered stone countertop company as a polisher, laminator, and fabricator. He was exposed to dust for 10 years from working with conglomerate or quartz surfacing materials containing 70%–90% crystalline silica.* This is the first reported case of silicosis associated with exposure to quartz surfacing materials in North America.

In 2010, the patient presented to a primary care provider with a 2-year history of persistent cough and dyspnea on exertion. He had no history of tobacco use or pulmonary disease. On physical examination, he had diminished bibasilar breath sounds and a right-sided inspiratory wheeze. Pulmonary function studies showed a combined obstructive and restrictive defect with no change post bronchodilator and reduced diffusion capacity. An electrocardiogram showed right ventricular hypertrophy, and cardiac catheterization confirmed the presence of pulmonary hypertension. A B Reader classified the patient's chest radiograph as large opacity Category "C" with 3/2 profusion, q/r bilateral upper and middle lobe rounded opacities. Computed tomography scan of the chest showed bilateral upper and middle lobe small rounded and large opacities, with hilar and mediastinal adenopathy. The worker was reassigned to a different job to minimize silica dust exposure. He is oxygen-dependent, and his medical condition is being monitored for possible lung transplantation.

Clusters of silicosis cases, some requiring lung transplantation, have occurred among fabrication workers exposed to silica dust from quartz surfacing materials in Israel, Italy, and Spain (1–4). In the last year, imports of quartz surfacing materials to the United States have risen 49%,§ and these materials are among the most popular countertop materials. The increased use of this silica-containing material poses a new risk for silica exposure (Read More). An investigation by CDC's National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health of the patient's work site is ongoing to identify work hazards and assess silica exposures and the health of the other employees.

February 13, 2015, Gary K. Friedman, Robert Harrison, Heidi Bojes, Karen Worthington, Margaret Filios, Read More

**Cystic fibrosis and arsenic poisoning linked to same damaged protein**

A new Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health co-authored study provides further evidence linking both arsenic poisoning and the chronic respiratory disease cystic fibrosis (CF) to damage in the CFTR protein. An examination of arsenic-exposed patients in Bangladesh found that they had elevated sweat chloride levels — the typical diagnostic sign of CF. While many patients also showed respiratory symptoms consistent with a CF diagnosis, none actually had the disease.


CF is caused by a genetic defect in the CFTR protein, which regulates the flow of chloride in and out of cells. Recent studies in cell culture show that arsenic causes the CFTR protein to break down. Better understanding of how arsenic damages the CFTR protein could lead to new, more affordable drugs for CF, according to the authors. The study also suggests
that patients exposed to arsenic should be monitored for CF-like disease.

Co-authors include Maitreyi Mazumdar, assistant professor in the Department of Environmental Health and David Christiani, Elkan Blout Professor of Environmental Genetics. The study was supported by the Harvard University Center for the Environment and the Harvard–National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) Center. Read More

**Inside China’s toxic Village of Widows**

Their black and white portraits stare out from sitting room walls: the husbands, fathers and sons snatched from a place they call the Village of Widows.

The families who live here, in the agricultural heartland where Chairman Mao was born and raised, blame carcinogens in their air, their soil and ultimately in their food for the cancers that have robbed household after household of their men.

Wu Feiyue said he believed heavy metals trapped in the village’s soil - and as a result its vegetables - caused the pancreatic cancer that killed his father. “The land poisoned him,” the 45-year-old said.

“We just want help to get out but the government just ignores us,” said Cheng Jiahui, a 73-year-old widow, who hung a photograph of her late husband beside a small shrine containing a miniature statue of Chairman Mao.

Villagers have no hard scientific evidence that links the pollution and the sickness that has claimed the lives of so many local men. But they are convinced that decades of uncontrolled industrialisation is to blame..

There are hundreds of such “cancer villages” across China, campaigners say, but no official study of them has ever been released.

The task of remedying that situation now falls to a UK-educated academic called Chen Jining who studied at Imperial College, London and went on to lead Tsinghua, one of his country’s top universities. Read More

**How China Is Screwing Over Its Poisoned Factory Workers**

THEY CALLED IT “banana oil.” Long Li didn’t ask what was in it. All she knew was that she was supposed to use it to clean cell phone screens, hundreds of them every hour. Fumes filled the air in the windowless room where she worked, in a three-story factory outside the southeastern China city of Dongguan.

Long, the 18-year-old daughter of peasant farmers from Guizhou, was supposed to dip her rubber-gloved right index finger into the oil and then rub each screen for 10 to 20 seconds. The company—Fangtai Huawei Electronic Technology—gave Long and her co-workers paper masks, but they rarely used them. They were too hot, and anyway the women who worked there often exhaled onto the screens because the condensed moisture from their breath made cleaning easier. Long worked from 8 am until 11 pm, and as late as 4 am in the busy season.
She didn’t complain. Long had fallen onto a kerosene lamp when she was 1 year old and burned her face; her father told her she had to be extra cheerful to make up for the scarring. Long had hoped to be a teacher for blind and deaf children, to help them through their own disabilities, but, tired of watching her parents labor in the field day after day, Long left for the city in the winter of 2011. At Fangtai Huawei, with overtime she could earn as much as 3,000 Yuan (about $485) a month to help her family.

Long moved to Dongguan when the working conditions of Chinese tech labourers had become an international issue. Suicides in 2010 at a factory owned by Foxconn Technology Group—a supplier for Apple, Hewlett-Packard, Sony, and other transnational companies—sparked investigations that found labourers were working long hours for insufficient pay and living in substandard housing. In response, in March 2012 Foxconn pledged to make things right. Apple and Samsung publicly investigated their Chinese supply chains and promised to hold contractors to Western health and safety standards.

*Shift work may promote unhealthy lifestyle*

(Reuters Health) – Shift work may lead to a poor diet and too little exercise, accounting for at least some of the increased health risks seen among people who work changing hours or regular overnights, a new study suggests.

Tracking airline employees in Finland, researchers found that people who worked varying shifts and night shifts on the ground consumed more fat and fewer vegetables and fruits than daytime ground personnel and in-flight workers.

“The occupational health care unit personnel had noticed that many shift workers had health risks,” said Katri Hemio, a nutritionist at the National Institute for Health and Welfare in Helsinki who led the study. “In addition, 70 percent of airline workers were working in shifts and most of them had irregular work hours,” she said.

“This makes the population vulnerable to the potential risks of shift work and also very suitable for studying (the) risks,” Hemio said.

Previous research has shown that shift workers have an increased risk for cardiovascular diseases, metabolic syndrome and type 2 diabetes, Hemio and coauthors note in Occupational and Environmental Medicine.

Shift workers also tend to gain more weight, the more they work the varying schedules. Night shift workers also sleep less, which can cause metabolic and cardiovascular problems, the authors point out.

The new study included 1,478 airline employees in an airline screening and prevention program for chronic diseases from 2006 to 2009. A little over half were men.

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