Occupational Safety and Health

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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.
ANROEV Meeting 2015

The 14th meeting of the Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational and Environmental Victims (ANROEV) was held from September 4-6, 2015 at Hanoi, Vietnam. The meeting saw participation of more than 100 delegates from more than 20 countries involved in rich and intense discussion on the status of occupational and environmental health in Asia. The delegates included representatives of health and safety organizations, labour organizations, environmental organizations, academics & scientists from various Universities, policymakers from Vietnam, representatives of International organizations like the ILO and the WHO, and representatives of the victim’s organizations, media, and newspapers. The theme of the meeting was “Prevention of Occupational Diseases and Improving Workplace Safety”. The Center for Development and Integration (CDI), a Vietnamese non-government, non-profit organization, and one of the leading organizations in Vietnam working towards protecting the legitimate rights and interests of workers was the local host during the meeting.

During the Opening session –

Mr. Vo Dai Luoc, General Director of VAPEC Vietnam stated that “Prevention of Occupational Diseases and Improving Workplace Safety” is a global topic and not an isolated topic of some countries. He stressed that workers, trade unions and government need to work closely together to improve workplace conditions.

Mr Sanjiv Pandita, Executive Director AMRC narrated how the ILO in Seoul in 2008 had issued a declaration stating that Occupational rights are human rights, however, since 2008 there have been a spate of industrial disasters in Bangladesh, Pakistan, Philippines, China etc killing thousands of workers to satisfy greed of a few.

Mr. Nguyen Anh Tho: Deputy Director General, Department of Work Safety, MOLISA stressed that the government of Vietnam was committed towards health and safety at work and had enacted a new labour law which would come into effect in July 2016. He stated that even foreign workers are protected under Vietnamese law.

Mr. Philip Hazelton, Chief Technical Advisor – Industrial Relations Department, ILO presented on the ILO strategies on OSH. According to estimates by the ILO, every year there are some 2 million deaths worldwide due to work-related causes. Of these, some 352,769 are due to fatal accidents in 2010. In addition, there are more than 1,979,262 occupational diseases in 2011, and this figure in ASEAN region also increases every year. The financial cost for these work-related hazards is significant. He congratulated Vietnam on ratifying ILO convention C155 and C187

These speeches were followed by heart rendering stories of suffering and loss of victims and their families. Ms. Lea Bersabal, a Kentex fire Victim (Philippines) showed video clip about the fire. She narrated the deplorable working conditions and low wages in the factory. 72 workers died in the fire. After the fire, the victims and survivors have begun to organize themselves and fight for their benefits and compensations.

Mr. Rajendra Pavekar, a secondary exposure Asbestosis victim from India spoke bout his father who worked for more thn 20 years in a asbestos
textile factory where he was never warned of any dager or given any protective equipment

Mr. Chih-Kang Wu from Taiwan spoke about how the US multinational Radio Corporation of America dumped waste and toxic material contaminating soil and ground water which was used by the workers and community. Hundreds of former workers have died of cancer or are a cancer patient.

Mr. Suparno, Sebastian K3 Centre for OSH, Indonesia shared a sad story of the famous worker Sebastian who committed suicide due to lack of government action despite several fatal accidents in PT Tpta Alam. Since his martyrdom, the Indonesian government has paid much more attention towards OSH issue.

Mr. Kang Chanho from Korea shared story about a disaster in Korea caused due to humidifier disinfectant in which more than 142 people have been confirmed to have died, mostly elderly, infants and pregnant women.

AR Repon Chowdhury from OSHE foundation presented an update on the twin tragedies of Tazreen fire and Rana Plaza Collapse. A network of victims of these disasters has been formed. 2800 victims have so far received compensation. A Rana Plaza Trust fund has been formed with help from ILO. However, problems remain with many buyers and brands not contributing to the fund.

Dr Huma Tabussum presented on the ANROEV initiative of training medical practitioners in the region to help diagnose invisible victims of occupational diseases and how she has been identifying more and more cases since she was trained.

Jason Chan from LAC presented an outline on the Occupational Cancer and chemical poisoning cases in China. 1541 cases of Occupational chemical poisoning were identified in 2013 and 41 cases of Leukemia due to Benzene Poisoning.

Dr Kong from SHARPS explained about the campaign against Samsung Semiconductor and the obstacles being created by the company by not accepting and following the order of the mediation process and pay compensation to the victims.

The participants broke into groups to attend simultaneous workshops. The workshop topics were

Day 1

1. Occupational Lung Diseases facilitated by Dr. Domyung Paek, Dr. Huma and Sanjiv Pandita

2. Digital Communication, solidarity and the building of a strong-ties network: Facilitated by Noel Colina and Miriam Lara-Meloy

The workshop introduced and shared the tools for participants to improve their content messaging and use, create, and integrate and maximize the use of digital communication into their work. The
workshop also identified digital tools that can be utilized by grassroots organizations in building solidarity to promote their programs and actions.

It was stressed that the type of social media that is used should be audience centric and it is important to include workers stories and not just have nice pictures. Examples of different social media tools and their use & purpose was discussed.

Miriam shared the tools to develop powerful messages and stories that are useful for the grassroots. She shared the strategy used by Hesperian Health Guides to develop their health manuals while Noel shared AMRC’s experience of using Social Media to increase their digital footprint and presence and to dissipate information and news.

Another exercise undertaken was to develop Visuals – Memes (pictures that many people recognize with either a caption of an edit to the picture to make it funny or sarcastic), short videos, recognizable images, were also discussed and various tools which can be used were explained.

As a group activity, the participants were also asked to prepare a social media strategy for a campaign applying the guidelines which were discussed in the workshop.

3. OSH and Environmental Victims Organizing facilitated by Asian Citizens Center for Environment and Health, South Korea, TAVOI.

The workshop saw several reports and case studies being presented which highlighted the problems caused by the pollution and chemicals used in the factories and workplaces among the workers but also in the neighboring communities.

The participants discussed several issues being faced like compensation, organizing workers and diagnosis and discussed on ways to highlight the issues based on campaigns in different forums like FIFA.

A movie on construction workers was shown from India. Another movie concerning the dumping of mercury in Kodaikanal, India by Unilver Ltd which has polluted the water and soil and is impacting the community to a large extent was also shown.

The participants discussed several challenges in organizing the victims like trust issues, inability to access the work places and meet workers, finances etc.

The case from Nepal concerning high level of lead found in school kids because of lead use in paints was discussed.

“It is very important for all workers to unite together to meet their goals” was a suggestions given by an Occupational accident victim from Taiwan based on his own experience of being a construction worker 33 years back.

Important Aspects like how to bring different interest groups together and the fact that “Most of the victims don’t realize that they themselves are
being victimized” – What kind of capacity needs to be built for them to fight for their rights?

This workshop followed on Day 2 with another workshop on Organising OSH and Environmental Victims facilitated by Environics Trust and ARIAV in which discussions continued from Day 1. Other discussion items were compensation systems in Hong Kong and how victims were being organized. Voice based News gathering, organizing, campaign strategy and alternate methods of organizing being used in India were also discussed.

Other workshops’ on Day 2 included

4. Occupational Lung Diseases – PTRC, BANJAN

The workshop saw participants from 9 countries and was a mix of medical experts, lawyers, industrial hygienists and activists. Presentations were made from India, Indonesia and China

LION from Indonesia presented on their project on Asbestos. They are working with the Asbestos roof factory workers on exposure assessment, medical surveillance and capacity building. Under the project they were able to motivate workers to take pictures of the workplace and even conduct personal air sampling inside the workplace. Result was 10-48% exceeding the PEL. 6 cases of Mesothelioma were reported only verbally by a hospital and no certificate of occupational disease was issued.

Participant from China explained about the problems faced by the ceramic workers. No pre-employment tests are conducted for comparison. If you raise your voice or complaint, the worker is summarily fired from job. The compensation process is extremely difficult and time consuming and more often than not, by the time your application reaches step 3 – claiming compensation, the worker would have succumbed to the disease.

Participants from India reported on the status of Silicosis workers in the country. Despite several orders by different courts and bodies, the recommendations are not being respected and implemented by several state governments. It was reported that PTRC has screened 1192 workers, 912 were sent for X rays out of which 406 have confirmed silicosis. 15 workers have died in 2015 so far.

Presentations were followed by discussions on extending the focus from Pneumoconiosis to other occupational lung diseases, identifying more cases of cancer and Mesothelioma and other issues faced by the workers.

5. Chemical hazards in the Electronics industry – SHARPS, ICRT, CDI

The workshop’s discussion was on the hazards recently in electronics production, the nature and extent of the diseases that have been identified so far, and what is being done to address the hazardous working conditions throughout Asia, with a focus on the Samsung cases in Korea, the RCA cases in Taiwan, the leukemia cases in China, and the Challenge to the Electronics industry that has been developed to promote solutions to these problems. Presentation from Vietnam on the situation in Electronics sector in the country were also made. The overview on Electronics hazards in Asia was presented by AMRC

A video on the stories and case studies from China was shown. Most of the workers in China work far away from home and hide their health problems from their families. Many workers have committed suicide due to work pressure and health issues.
It was suggested to develop a model of Training of Trainers which needs to be developed further to help in capacity building of different organisations.

An open letter to Samsung which has been signed by more than 500 International people so far was discussed.

Afternoon of Day 2 saw the participants come back together. Ms Kathy Jenkins from European Work Hazard Network spoke about how the factories in EU are facing the same problems although the scale and intensity is different. She stated about how the governments in EU are attacking labour rights and making the atmosphere more business friendly.

The network then brainstormed to discuss and consolidate the action plan till 2017 and identified common areas to work.

A field Visit was organized to an Electronics Processing zone in Bac Ninh province where the delegates had an opportunity to meet with the workers and Trade Union leaders and got to know about the working conditions in the processing zone and the problems they faced.

The meeting closed with a vote of thanks to all participants and organisers.

A conference page with all material and photos with regards to the conference can be found by clicking here (Password ANROEV_2015$).

The above page also contains the report of activities of member organisations in the past 2 years.

The network members decided to form several working groups to ensure efficient working of the network and to help formulate joint campaigns and strategies. The members present at the conference also nominated their respective organizations to be part of one or more working groups and also the members selected an organization to be the facilitator of the working group. It was discussed that the facilitator organization will take the lead in formulating the roles and responsibilities of the working group and along with the agenda of activities to be undertaken by the network.

The working groups are as below.

- Research and Diagnosis
- Organising, Advocacy and Campaigns
- Education and Training
- Social Media and Communication

**ABAN Meeting 2015**

The meeting of the Asian Ban Asbestos Network was held in Hanoi from September 6-7, 2015. More than 80 participants from diverse fields comprising of government officials, activists, victims, policy makers, researchers etc participated in the meeting. The meeting was hosted by the Vietnam Ban Asbestos (VNBAN) group.

Opening the meeting, Dr Tran Tuan from VNBAN welcomed the participants to the meeting. Introductory speeches from ILO, WHO and Australian Aid Abroad saw the delegates urging the governments in the world to ban the use of Asbestos immediately.

Dr Ken Takahashi, Director of the WHO Collaborating Centre for Occupational Health at the University of Occupational and Environmental Health (UOEH) spoke on his work and the recommendations of WHO on asbestos related diseases. Terming the reports from ILO, WHO and other international organizations as the most comprehensive review on scientific evidence.
regarding asbestos concluding that the scientific consensus is that asbestos is carcinogenic with no safe usage limits, Mr Furuya dared the opponents to prove by providing scientific data which is available for peer review by the international independent community.

Mr Sugio Furuya, Coordinator ABAN presented on update on the activities of the network and various challenges being faced.

Mr Rajendra Pevekar from India who is a secondary exposure victim narrated his experience and struggles because of this disease. Testimonies from Mr. Ji Yol Jung and Mr. Dong Wook Hwang from Korea further showed how dangerous asbestos is.

Mr Ram Charitra Sah from Nepal presented on the successful campaign to ban use of asbestos in Nepal. Nepal has banned use of Asbestos in November 2014 with some exceptions. Mr. Kam Hong CHAN from Association of the Rights of Industrial Accident Victims (ARIAV) and Peter Tighe, CEO of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Agency provided an update of their work in Hong Kong and Australia.

In the afternoon the participants divided into groups based on regions to have an in depth discussion on the situation on asbestos. The different groups formed their action plans for activities over the next 12-18 months in different regions on asbestos.

Mr Yeyong Choi from BANKO introduced his project about Asbestos fibre monitoring. He explained the process of sampling and precautions to be taken. He also shared some results of his work from Korea and Indonesia which had surprising and dangerous results. The project is now being taken up in several countries.

Day 2 saw a visit to a cement roof factory which also manufactures asbestos free roofing product. - Dr. Do Quoc Quang, Former Vice Director, Institute of Technology, Ministry of Industry and Trade explained the process of manufacturing Asbestos free product and insisted that this product is only marginally expensive and has same properties. This product is also being exported to countries like Korea and Japan meeting strict import guidelines.

A film commissioned by WHO on the voice of chrysotile victims from South East Asia was shown and Mr Sanjiv Pandita, AMRC shared his experiences of participating in the Rotterdam convention where a few countries hijacked the process.

The participants discussed on the future plans of the network and the meeting closed with a vote of thanks to all participants and organisers.

A conference page with all material and photos with regards to the conference can be found by clicking here (Password ABAN_2015$$)

Some photos from the ABAN Meeting
10th anniversary of the Kubota Shock - Amagasaki meeting

"Amagasaki meeting for achieving the justice for asbestos victims and their families and the elimination of ARDs - 10 years after the Kubota Shock" was held in June 2015. Amagasaki branch of National victim's network composes near 300 environmental asbestos victims and their families. Representatives of victims groups in Italy, Belgium and Korea also joined the meeting. Eric and three representatives from Casale, Italy - Bruno, Assunta and Alessandro together with members of local victims group met the Mayor of Amagasaki City on June 26. Eric wrote in his facebook "history is being written"

2015 Amagasaki Declaration for elimination of Asbestos Disaster

On June 29, 2005 the Kubota Corporation disclosed a fact that 79 (former) workers of the company and its affiliate companies had died of asbestos-related disease. Next day – on June 30, three mesothelioma victims - the late Ms. Keiko MAEDA, Ms. Masako DOI and Mr. Yoshikazu HAYAKAWA, who had lived near a former asbestos cement manufacturing plant of Kubota in Amagasaki and had no occupational asbestos exposure history - came forward as environmental asbestos victims.

This meeting is held just 10 years after that. The number of environmental asbestos victims who have claimed compensation against the Kubota became 298. It was really somber 10 years for those who had lived and spent their working/school time near the Kubota's plant in Amagasaki.

On the other hand the Kubota Shock has revealed hidden asbestos disasters and their real extent in Japan at a burst. Everybody became aware of asbestos disaster. Environmental asbestos victims have been found in other areas too and health monitoring for the residents is being conducted by the Ministry of the Environment and local governments. Recently Osaka, Sakai, Nishinomiya and Ashiya cities have joined this program.

We have won again and again in administrative litigations to make the government recognizing asbestos-related lung cancer cases more properly. The plaintiffs of Sennan asbestos litigation on the
Government liability have finally won at the Supreme Court in last October. The Minister of Health, Labor and Welfare apologized to them and achieved settlements with all plaintiffs. Following this more Government liability litigations are now being brought into courts. This Amagasaki meeting has been seeking not only the justice for all asbestos victims and their families but also the elimination of asbestos disaster. Asbestos in school or asbestos after earthquake/tsunami, which is attracting the media/public attentions, require more strengthening measures to prevent the release of asbestos fibers.

Recently the Air Pollution Prevention Act was revised and a new scheme for licensing the specialist identifying asbestos containing materials in the buildings was launched but the effectiveness of them should be strictly monitored. Furthermore we have to recognize that huge amount of asbestos is still being used in Asian countries like China and India and have to act for the global ban on asbestos.

We, all participants of this meeting, never accept attempts to close the curtain of asbestos agenda by the government and business enterprises. We declare to continue to work for achieving the justice for asbestos victims and their families and the elimination of asbestos disaster together with people in Korea, Indonesia, Italy, Belgium and all over the world.

Pictures are available at: http://1drv.ms/1g1OpwS and http://1drv.ms/1Ju2UG7

3rd Anniversary of Ali Enterprises Factory Fire Tragedy

Families seek monument to Baldia factory fire victims

KARACHI: A monument be erected at the place where the burnt-out facade of the Baldia garments factory stands and the culprits behind the country’s deadliest fire that claimed 259 lives on September 11, 2012 be arrested, demanded the families of the victims on the third anniversary of the incident.

Congregated in front of the Baldia factory where they were received with red flags on Friday, the families once again relived the evening when the fire broke out in the factory claiming hundreds of lives apart from injuring countless others.

Organised by the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF), the memorial reference made most people break down from time to time as they discussed their ordeal after losing their loved ones.

Sitting with the pictures of their loved ones, some of them were made to sit on the stage where they shared their stories one by one and demanded justice for those left behind.

Sitting near the stage, Nasreen Shaheen whose brother-in-law died in the fire narrated that they were recently given the compensation money for the loss. Travelling from Gulshan-i-Iqbal with a toddler in arms, she said her husband slipped in and out of depression whenever the Baldia factory blaze anniversary approached. “Nothing can compensate for the loss of a loved one,” she says, as near the podium families from New Karachi entered and were being shown the way. “My husband was refusing to take the money but I reminded him of his family and their needs after his brother died. There’s nobody to take care of his parents. This money will at least ensure a respectful life for them,” she added.
On the stage, NTUF general secretary Nasir Mansoor was asking everyone to understand why the city did not mourn the loss of their women and children. While answering himself, he said it was “because we shut the city when it suits us. No one cares for the children of the poor”. Read More

**Hazard control for better occupational safety and health in electronics industry**

A 2-day training program was organized in Bac Ninh, Vietnam for the workers in the electronics sector the Center for Development and Integration (CDI) in cooperation with Bac Ninh Labor Union and supported by Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC). The province has attracted 844 projects with the total investment of more than 8.82 billion dollars registered, including 522 FDI projects with total registered capital of 7.46 billion US dollars, accounting for 84.6% of total investment in the industrial zones.

According to Ms. Nguyen Thi Nanh, Vice President of Bac Ninh Labor Union (LU), In 2014, there were 73 labor accidents that caused 2 deaths and 71 injured cases in the province. One of the reasons is that both employers and employees do not understanding the necessary of OSH during the process of production.

During the training, participants comprising of government officials, Trade union representatives, safety officers, workers etc were introduced to several training tools. The Hazard Map exercise helped them map the entire production area while the Toxic T-Shirt activity helped them understand the impacts of several chemicals.

Through role-plays and discussions, participants also shared about ergonomics, stress and the difficulties of daily work routine. This session helped officers who are not working directly at the production lines understand better the working conditions and hazards of workers in the factories.

Based on the learnings of the training, the participants also developed an action plan for improving their workplaces.

**NGT asks 5 mineral-rich states to survey all asbestos mines**

NEW DELHI: The National Green Tribunal has asked five mineral-rich states to survey all the asbestos and associated mineral mines and file a report stating the impact of overburden or waste lying at these mines and pits. A bench headed by judicial member U D Salvi observed that it is a matter of concern that asbestos and associated mineral mines have not been closed scientifically.

"In the instant case none of the mines both asbestos and associated minerals have been closed scientifically. Final mining closure plans have also not been submitted by concerned lessees. This can be a matter of concern," the bench said.
"We therefore, direct the respective states to cause the survey of all the asbestos mines as well as of associated minerals with asbestos and state before us the impact of overburden lying at the said mines and the pits existing there as of today, and if the overburden and such pits are noted then what the state proposes to do about restoration and restitution of the said area," the tribunal said.

Overburden also called waste or spoil is the material that lies above an area that is removed during surface mining and may be used to restore an exhausted mining site. Read more

**Much-needed probe into overwork**

An outline of the government’s efforts to prevent death from overwork — now being prepared by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry — calls for long-term research to track down the causal relationship between work conditions of corporate employees and their health problems, whose outcome is to be utilized in the measures to eradicate ways of work that impair the physical as well as mental health of workers. Collecting and analyzing cases of overwork that resulted in death or suicide should serve as a long-overdue step in the fight to eliminate such tragedies, but much more needs to be done.

The ministry is working on the outline as required by a law enacted last year that made it the government’s obligation to promote efforts to prevent death from overwork. Based on a draft submitted by the ministry last month to a panel comprised of experts, representatives of employers and labor unions as well as families of victims, the government plans to compile the outline by this summer.

The probe will cover not only workers in private-sector companies but government employees and self-employed people. The outcome of the research should be shared by all parties concerned, so that staff at municipal governments and businesses can offer relevant advice to prevent health impairment of workers.

It’s been a long while since preventing karoshi — the Japanese term for death from overwork — has been billed as an urgent task for the Japanese society to address. Chronically long working hours remain a problem for many of the nation’s corporate workers. Without waiting for the outcome of the research, the national and local governments, employers and labor circles need to act quickly and work closely together to stop the ways of work that damage workers’ health. Read More

**When I lost my hands making flatscreens I can't afford, nobody would help me**

On February 11, 2011, I lost both my hands.

I was working an overnight shift at my job in Reynosa, Mexico, where I was cutting metal for parts used in assembling flatscreen televisions. I was working in my usual area, and the boss was pressuring us.

“I want you to work faster, because we need the material urgently,” he said.

I was moved to Machine 19, which can rip and cut metal and takes two hands to operate. It is heavy, weighing at least one ton, maybe two, and no one liked to work on it because it was too difficult. They always seemed to assign it to me.

I started work at 11pm. Around 2 or 2:30am, I was positioning metal inside Machine 19. My hands were actually inside the machine, because I had to push the metal in until it clicked into place.

That’s when the machine fell on top of them.

I screamed. Everyone around me was crying and yelling. They stopped the assembly line on the female side of the room, but the men were told to keep working.

Meanwhile, I was stuck. No one could lift the machine off my hands. They remained trapped for 10 minutes, crushed under the machine.
Finally, a few fellow employees created a makeshift jack to lift the machine up just enough for me to pull my hands out. I wasn’t bleeding very much, because the machine actually sealed the ends of my arms and forged them to the piece of metal. They took me to the hospital with the piece attached to my hands. The doctors were surprised when I showed up like that. I remember saying, 'Take the piece off. Take it off.’ But they didn’t want to.”

My hands were flattened like tortillas, mangled, and they both had to be amputated. I lost my right hand up to my wrist and my left a little higher. I didn’t know how I’d ever work again.

Immediately, I started to worry about my children. I have six children at home, who were between the ages of 9 and 17 during the accident, and I am both mother and father to them. How would I take care of them now? Read More

An Open Letter Calling on Samsung to Accept the Recommendations of the Mediation Committee

On July 23, 2015, a formal Mediation Committee established by Samsung and civil society groups issued its ground breaking recommendations to compensate the hundreds of workers who became ill while working at Samsung and to implement innovative prevention policies to protect their workers in the future. More than 70 workers have died due to work related illnesses at Samsung, according to SHARPS, an occupational health advocacy group in South Korea. While critical of some of the compromise aspects of the Committee’s recommendations, SHARPS has embraced the decision.

Samsung has agreed to the Committee’s recommendation to provide 100 billion won ($85.8 million), but has rejected the core recommendation — the funding of an independent non-profit foundation — that was the committee’s primary recommendation for implementing the victims compensation and to develop and implement steps to prevent the recurrence of the disease.

We endorse this Open Letter and call on Samsung to accept its corporate social responsibility by accepting the Mediation Committee’s recommendation to establish and fund the independent body to implement the decision.

Add your name to this Open Letter by clicking here

Calling Samsung for responsibility

In 2007, 22 year-old Hwang Yu-mi, who had been working at a Samsung semiconductor plant in South Korea, died of leukemia. Shortly after Yu-mi’s death, her co-worker who she shared a work station with also died of leukemia, at age 30.

Suspecting a connection between these young women’s deaths and the chemicals they handled at work, Yu-mi’s father began a campaign for justice for his daughter and other Samsung workers similarly afflicted.

Working with SHARPS, an occupational health organization, he found that over 200 Samsung workers in South Korea have become ill because of toxic exposures at work, and that more than 70 of them have died so far.

Eight years after Yu-mi’s death, Samsung has finally apologized for the deaths and agreed to pay compensation to workers. However, Samsung still lacks a system to ensure future workers are protected from toxic chemicals at work.

We are calling on Samsung to fund an independent non-profit foundation that will determine how to fairly distribute compensation to workers for their diseases and how to develop an effective strategy for assessing and incorporating safer chemicals into production, in order to prevent future diseases.

Without a plan to monitor and remove hazardous chemicals, young Samsung workers like Yu-mi are unknowingly risking their lives every day, just by
coming to work. By Elizabeth O’Connell, Campaigns Director, Green America – Read More

**Behind Deadly Tianjin Blast, Shortcuts and Lax Rules**

TIANJIN, China — One partner was the son of a local police chief, the other an executive at a state-run chemicals firm. After meeting at a dinner party, they started a company here to handle the export of the most dangerous chemicals made in China, promising “outstanding service” and “good results.”

Within two years, Rui Hai International Logistics had built a reputation as the go-to place for businesses looking to ship hazardous materials to customers abroad, a niche market that had been dominated by sluggish state enterprises.

Rui Hai offered lower prices, a no-hassle approach to paperwork and quick government approvals. Business was brisk. It seemed like another success story for the Binhai New Area, a thriving economic development zone established here by the ruling Communist Party around one of China’s busiest seaports.

In interviews with more than a dozen of Rui Hai’s former clients and associates — and unusually critical reports in China’s state-controlled news media — a picture has emerged of a company that exploited weak governance in one of the party’s showcase economic districts and used political connections to shield its operations from scrutiny.

Rui Hai began handling hazardous chemicals before it obtained a permit to do so, and it secured licenses and approvals from at least five local agencies that conducted questionable reviews of its operations. Local authorities outsourced one safety review required for a storage permit to a private contractor that Rui Hai selected and paid.

As much as 3,000 tons of hazardous chemicals were stored at Rui Hai on the night of the explosions, including 700 tons of sodium cyanide, deadly in a dose of less than a tablespoon, and 1,300 tons of fertilizer nitrates, more than 500 times the amount used in the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

Rui Hai’s shipping yard covered more than 11 acres, but clients said it routinely packed huge volumes of different volatile chemicals together in haphazard fashion instead of storing them separately, at safe distances and in smaller quantities as recommended in the industry.

“Nobody wanted to stand in their way,” said one chemicals exporter in Tianjin, who asked not to be named to protect his business from reprisal, when asked why regulators took no action. Read More

**On the World Day for Decent Work: Metalworkers Alliance calls for regular jobs to all workers and an end to precarious work; challenges Presidentiables to act squarely on contractualization**

“Every worker has a right to regular work. A work that will enable him and his family to live decently. A work that will enable him to recover his energy and strength to continue his work the next day.”

This is the statement of the Metal Workers Alliance of the Philippines (MWAP), a national alliance of unions and workers in the electronics, automotive, mining, shipbuilding, metal, steel and related industries, in today’s observance of the World Day for Decent Work.

The IndustriALL Global Union, of which MWAP is an affiliate, is also holding today a Global Day of Action to STOP Precarious Work.

MWAP, together with other IndustriALL affiliates in the Philippines, marched from Liwasang Bonifacio to Intramuros, Manila this morning to hold a protest action in front of the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). A dialogue with Labor
Secretary Rosalinda Baldoz followed after the action.

MWAP underscored the precarious situation of the Filipino workers, exemplified by low wages, massive contractualization, unsafe and inhumane conditions at work, and violation of workers’ rights.

MWAP called for the abolition of D.O. 18-A, which it said further intensified labor flexibilization schemes. “Approximately 70-80% of the workers, especially in the economic zones, are contractuals. Majority of them are women. They get lower wages, have no benefits and are treated like rags that capitalists can get rid of anytime they want. They are subjected to inhumane conditions and are often discriminated. Their fundamental rights to join or form unions and have a CBA is not respected,” said MWAP Secretary General Christopher Oliquino.

“We urge Pres. Noynoy Aquino to squarely address the issue of massive contractualization. We also challenge the presidentiables as well as prospective Senate and Congress representatives to include in their platform the issue of workers’ security of tenure and how to arrest widespread contractualization,” adds Oliquino.

MWAP hit the high incidence of occupational accidents in the country. “The Kentex fire that killed more than 72 workers showed us that slave-like conditions continue to exist here and how vulnerable the workers’ lives are in such conditions,” adds Oliquino. MWAP urged the Philippine Government to pass House Bill 4635 or Workers’ SHIELD which calls for criminalization and stiffer penalties for violations of occupational health and safety standards.

Bilang tao, nagtatrabajo tayo para mabuhay. Pero dahil sa pagkaganid sa tubo ng mga kapitalista, parang nabuhay na lamang tayo para magtrabaho para sa kanila, (As humans, we are supposed to work in order to live. But corporate greed made us live just to work for the capitalists.), said Oliquino.

“As primary movers of the country’s economy, we demand to be treated with dignity and respect. We demand a stop to precarious work. We demand regular jobs and security of tenure for all workers. We demand for a living wage. It is our right. It is for us, for our families, for the future generation,” ends Oliquino.

Reference: Christopher Oliquino, MWAP Secretary General, 0908-5772960

**Relief paid to the kins of diseased agate workers**

On May 6, 2015 Gujarat State Government Labour Officer (Rural) distributed cheques to 13 families of diseased agate workers at Khambhat. In 2014 Labour & Employment Ministry of Gujarat State passed and published resolution to pay Rs.1 lakh towards relief to the families of Agate workers dying of Silicosis. The resolution is applicable from 2006. One of the beneficiaries Jashiben rushed from Ahmedabad to receive the cheque. She lost her husband Purshottambhai Vankar. Expressing her satisfaction she said that she passed through tremendous difficulties and this amount is a great help to her. She thanked PTRC for working for the welfare of Agate workers.

Speaking at the function Jagdish Patel, Director, Peoples Training & Research center said that this is historical moment in the long history of struggle for social justice for these workers. This is first step and
lot more needs to be done, he added. Mr. M.K. Sayed, GLO extended his wishes to the beneficiaries.

Since last more than 50 years agate workers keep dying of silicosis. Consistent struggle by PTRC has helped recognize the problem by the State. In 2007 PTRC initiated weekly clinic to screen the exposed agate workers. Karamsad Medical College give their free service for diagnosis while Cardiac care center, Khamabht provide free X-rays to the workers. This has helped more than 1200 workers to be tested for silicosis. More than 300 workers have been found positive out of which over 100 have succumbed due to their lung injury. Now State health department has set up infrastructure for diagnosis of silicosis at local level which needs to be strengthened further.

**Moving documentary by Al Jazeera on RCA cancer victims**

More than 1,500 former RCA (Radio Corporation America) workers in Taiwan have been diagnosed with cancer. For nearly two decades, they have been waging a David and Goliath battle as they seek justice in the courts for their suffering. Al Jazeera joins them as they await the verdict in this landmark case.

The company admits that it dumped hazardous waste, polluting the land and poisoning groundwater. But did Radio Corporation of America recklessly expose its employees to cancer-causing chemicals?

Al Jazeera’s 101 East investigates whether their health was sacrificed as Taiwan pursued its goal of becoming a high-tech manufacturing hub.

Watch the video [here](#). [Read More](#)

**Research on labour disputes at NXP**

Amsterdam, 2 June 2015 - Today, as Dutch chipmaker NXP is holding its annual shareholder meeting, the GoodElectronics Networks publishes a research about NXP’s conflicts with local trade unions in 2014. The year was characterized by major labour disputes, strikes and international solidarity actions, but these are not included in NXP’s Annual Report. These disputes could cause disruptions to production, putting a strain on NXP’s current business achievements. NXP also risks the goodwill of high-profile customers such as Apple who are sensitive for labour rights violations in their supply chain.

Union members dismissed in the Philippines- For the NXP union in the Philippines, problems started in May 2014, when a group of workers was pulled out of production and fired for participating in and encouraging a so-called illegitimate strike. As the “strike” happened during a public holiday where workers are not obliged to work, the termination was actually a case of union-busting: all 24 dismissed workers were union officers and member of the collective bargaining negotiation panel.

Harassment of union members in Thailand- Negotiations with the Thai NXP Manufacturing Workers’ Union have been ongoing since September 2012. One of the issues is the new 12-hour shift schedule which has replaced the 8-hour working days. A call for action by the union led to a lock-out of the union members and officials. The harassment of the union is still ongoing today and a new collective bargaining agreement was recently put on hold.

Sakoldet Silapong of GoodElectronics Thailand: “NXP claims the new work schedule is in compliance with Thai labour laws, but the company should abide by international labour standards like the ILO core conventions”

Findings - NXP claims to have good relationships with all its employees and views the disputes with the unions as regular discussions that can take place between company and employee representatives. The case studies indicate otherwise, however. With the introduction of the new work schedule with 12-hour working days in the Thai facility, NXP is
depriving its employees of an international labor right as laid down in ILO Convention 1; the right to an 8-hour working day. The illegal dismissal of trade union representatives is a violation of ILO Convention 87 which includes companies to refrain from actions that hamper workers to exercise their trade union rights.

Irene Schipper – researcher at SOMO: “NXP claims it has good relations with all its employees, but actually the company hides some major conflicts from its shareholders. We advise NXP to re-evaluate its employee relations and invest in good relations with local trade unions”.

Read the full report here
Watch a video about the dismissal in the Philippines here

This report was written by SOMO and published by the GoodElectronics Network
Contact: Pauline Overeem, p.overeem@goodelectronics.org,

Helping Workers Protect Themselves

Garrett Brown on Improving Factory Worker Health and Safety Outside the Developed World

Salt Palace Convention Center, Salt Lake City (June 1, 2015)—On Monday afternoon, Garrett D. Brown, MPH, CIH, delivered the Jeffrey S. Lee Lecture to a standing-room-only crowd, discussing how the offshoring of the manufacture of consumer goods over the past two decades has resulted in the transfer of occupational health and safety hazards to developing countries that are underprepared to address them. Brown outlined the problems that global supply chains create for workers—including very long hours, unsafe and unhealthy conditions, and physical abuse and sexual harassment—and explained why little progress has been made to improve working conditions in these factories over the past 20 years, since the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement helped spur the U.S. economy’s increased reliance on global supply chains.

“The sweatshop business model; ineffective, corrupt monitoring; and lack of any meaningful worker participation in developing, implementing, and maintaining [occupational health and safety programs]” are the key reasons for such slow progress in increasing protections for workers employed by these foreign-owned factories, Brown said.

Brown highlighted the “relentless drive” of corporations to cut per-unit price as a contributing factor to poor working conditions in the factories.

“Suppliers are constantly being squeezed,” he said, adding that last-minute design and order changes, the use of short-term contracts, and the lack of financial support for occupational health and safety programs exacerbate the issue.

“Sustainable improvements are impossible without resolving the big-picture issues,” Brown said. “And having ever more elaborate occupational health and safety management systems will not address underlying problems.”

By Kay Bechtold Read More

Workers demand end to contract system, permission to form unions

KARACHI: On the International Decent Work Day, workers in different cities demanded the government do away with the cruel contract system of labour and allow workers to form unions and have collective bargaining agents in all factories, industries and workplaces.

National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) on the appeal of IndustriAll Global Union staged demos and rallies in different industrial cities and towns of Pakistan, including Karachi, Hyderabad, Multan, Faisalabad and Gadani, and demanded to end the contract system of labour. They also asked to give all workers their basic right of forming labour unions
and collective bargaining agents in their workplaces. In Karachi, the NTUF staged a big rally in front of the Karachi Press Club (KPC) which was attended by a large number of workers, trade union leaders and civil society members. It was led by NTUF Central President Muhammad Rafiq Baloch.

Nasir Mansoor, deputy general secretary of the NTUF said that precarious work has become the hallmark of all production sectors in Pakistan. In whole world more and more workers are being engaged in production process on temporary basis. Permanent jobs, good wages and work safety and health facilities are under attack in whole world. To get more and more profit the industrialists have launched contract labour system with full force. Workers are left to the mercy of market forces in violation of all labour laws and norms, and these market rules are set by big corporations, multinational companies and international financial institutions. Read More

‘Cotton’s Forgotten Children’

Almost half a million Indian children are working to produce the cottonseed that is the basis for our garments and all the other textile products that we use. Around 200,000 of them are below 14 years of age. This is one of the shocking results of the new study ‘Cotton’s Forgotten Children’ by India’s long-term expert on the issue, Dr. Davuluri Venkateswarlu.

It is equally shocking that the number of children working in the cotton seed fields has increased with almost 100,000 since the last all-India study on this issue in 2010. Children’s below 14 constitute around 25% of the workforce on the fields of the farmers that supply their seeds to both Indian and multinational companies. Another 35% of the workforce are children between 14 and 18 years of age.

The report criticises the Indian state governments, especially those of Gujarat and Rajasthan, for ‘not paying serious attention to tackle the issue’ and ‘being in the denying mood’. On the role of the seed companies it states: ‘The response of the seed industry as a whole to address the problem of child labour is minimal’.

Long working days – Exposed to pesticides - Children below 14 – of which two-thirds are girls - are employed in the seed fields on a long-term contract basis through loans extended to their parents by local seed producers, who have agreements with the large national and multinational seed companies. Children are made to work 8 to 12 hours a day and are exposed to poisonous pesticides used in high quantities in cottonseed cultivation. Most of the children working in cottonseed farms belong to poor Dalit (‘outcaste’), Adivasi (tribal) or Backward Castes families. Around 70% of the children are hired or even trafficked from other states while 30% is ‘family labour’. Most are school-dropouts.

Hopeful signs - There are also some hopeful signs. The number of children below 14 working on seed farms – in proportion to the total workforce - has dropped in all states. In Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu there was a significant decline of 42% and 69% respectively of young children working in the seed fields.

The report also recognizes a number of initiatives undertaken by multinational companies like Bayer, Monsanto and DuPont, some local companies, government agencies, Unicef, NGOs like MV Foundation in Andhra Pradesh and a union like DRMU in Gujarat which helped to reduce the number of young working children.

However due to the very substantial increase of production area, especially in Gujarat and Rajasthan, the total number of working children has nevertheless increased substantially. The number of adolescents doing this work has increased since 2010 with 70,000 and the number of young children with almost 30,000.

Below minimum wages for women - The other main issue in the new report is the payment of wages
below the official minimum wage, especially to women. For specific tasks mainly allocated to women and children – especially the labour-intensive cross-pollination – wages are paid that are substantially below the official state or zonal minimum wages. This happens in all the states. Despite this and earlier reports on the issue (e.g. Wages of Inequality, December 2012) this issue has not yet been tackled effectively by government and companies and has hardly been taken up by civil society.

Recommendations

The 47-page report contains 11 recommendations for both companies, the National Seed Association of India and the (state) governments to tackle child labour, below official minimum or living wages and other labour rights violations. Read More

Biodegradable Electronics Could Save Us from the E-Wasteland

We all know that we are supposed to properly dispose of our laptop and computer batteries. We also know that we don’t do that. Unlike most of our trash, electronic waste isn’t even close to biodegradable. Instead, it piles up in various places around the world and wreaks further havoc on the environment. Worldwide, 20-50 millions tons of e-waste is produced every single year. At the rate we cycle through technology, it would be better for everyone and the Earth if this e-waste was at least biodegradable. Soon, it might be.

Germany based Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT) Young Investigator group is working on biodegradable electronic components. While they haven’t constructed complete electronic devices, they have created OLEDs and other components. The Young Investigator group is using semiconductors and dyes made from plant extracts and insulators made of gelatin. After use, the parts can be thrown away into a compost bin where they will rot like fruit.

“These may not be as long-lived as the inorganic alternatives,” says Dr. Gerardo Hernandez-Sosa, leader of the Biolicht Young Investigator Group of KIT, “but they easily survive the service life of disposable electronics.” A service life that, just based on technology company keynotes throughout the year, is growing shorter and shorter. Read More

The True Costs of the Chemical Industry's Products

The true costs of the chemical industry’s products includes more than just the costs to produce them. The costs of illness and environmental devastation amount to over $1 trillion (USD) per year, paid for by the public rather than the chemical industry. This approximately 5 minute video shows the people and places affected by the chemical industry’s products and their externalized costs.

* The video has no sound * Watch Video

Regional News

Environment: Commission takes POLAND and SLOVENIA to Court for e-waste failings

The European Commission is referring Poland and Slovenia to the EU Court of Justice over their failure to enact EU legislation on the recycling of waste electrical and electronic equipment. The EU rules, which should have been enacted into national law by 14 February 2014, are intended to prevent or reduce negative environmental impacts from this fast increasing waste stream. The rules are a "recast" of the previous WEEE Directive, and they incorporate a number of new or substantially modified provisions. None of the Member States in question have enacted any of these new or substantially modified provisions.
For Poland, the Commission is asking the Court to impose penalty payments of EUR 71 610 per day until the law is enacted.

For Slovenia, the Commission is asking the Court to impose penalty payments of EUR 8 408.4 per day until the law is enacted.

The recast Directive modernises previous legislation, making it fit for purpose and more forward-looking, in line with the objectives of the circular economy. It introduces an ambitious new collection target of 45% of electronic equipment sold that will have to be met in 2016 and, as a second step in 2019, a target of 65% of equipment sold or 85% of WEEE generated. The new rules make registration and reporting requirements easier for Member States, with better tools to fight the illegal export of

Noam Chomsky Urges Samsung to Fund Leukemia Foundation

Samsung Electronics said last month that it would pay compensation to leukemia victims and implement measures to prevent leukemia recurrence instead of funding an independent non-profit foundation, the primary recommendation made by a mediation committee, which was formed to arbitrate between Samsung Electronics and its former workers suffering from diseases after working at its display and semiconductor facilities. Such a move has triggered a backlash from international activists and campaign groups. Thus, they are now gathering signatures to reprimand Samsung Electronics.

In particular, as world-renowned scholars are calling on Samsung Electronics to accept the mediation committee’s key recommendation, the chipmaker’s cancer scandal is likely to be thrown into the international spotlight.

On August 14, Ted Smith, the founder of the International Campaign for Responsible Technology (ICRT), disclosed “An Open Letter Calling on Samsung to Accept the Recommendations of the Mediation Committee” on http://bit.ly/1MsZiVW.

“We endorse this Open Letter and call on Samsung to accept its corporate social responsibility by accepting the Mediation Committee’s recommendation to establish and fund the independent body to implement the decision. Add your name to this Open Letter by clicking here,” the Letter said. It also detailed the background of the chipmaker’s cancer scandal, introducing a leukemia victim’s story.

The Open Letter won support from Noam Chomsky (professor of linguistics emeritus at MIT and “The conscience of the American people”) and Charles Levenstein (editor of New Solutions (an international journal of occupational and environmental health policy)). Read More

Infirm former Samsung workers slam company response

SEOUL, South Korea — When she began working at a Samsung Electronics factory as a semiconductor assembly line worker at the age of 18, Kim Mi-seon says she was given a clean bill of health by company doctors. By the time Kim left three years later, she had been diagnosed with multiple sclerosis, which scientists believe is triggered by environmental factors. Now, the nervous system disease has left Kim nearly blind.

Even over a decade after being diagnosed with MS, 35-year-old Kim can only shake her head and say, “I didn’t think I would one day be unable to recognize my own mother.”

Kim suspects that her illness — which occurs at a rate of about four in 100,000 in South Korea — was caused by the toxic substances she was exposed to on the job. She is joined by over 200 other former Samsung Electronics workers who have reported that they suffer from illnesses they believe were caused by their workplace.
On Sept. 19, Samsung announced that it would begin accepting applications for compensation for the first time since the issue came to light in 2007, when 22-year-old Samsung Electronics factory worker Hwang Yu-mi died from acute myeloid leukemia. But for many victims, the move is not a victory. “I don’t agree with it at all,” said Kim, who is boycotting Samsung's plan. “They’re just plowing through with no regard for the arbitration process that they themselves agreed to.”

**Samsung TVs appear less energy efficient in real life than in tests**

Independent lab tests have found that some Samsung TVs in Europe appear to use less energy during official testing conditions than they do during real-world use, raising questions about whether they are set up to game energy efficiency tests.

The European commission says it will investigate any allegations of cheating the tests and has pledged to tighten energy efficiency regulations to outlaw the use of so-called “defeat devices” in TVs or other consumer products, after several EU states raised similar concerns.

The apparent discrepancy between real-world and test performance of the TVs is reminiscent of the VW scandal that originated in the US last week. The car company has admitted fitting software to 11m diesel vehicles worldwide which meant the cars produced less pollution during testing than real-world driving.

Samsung strongly denies that its TVs’ “motion lighting” feature is designed to fool official energy efficiency tests or that it constitutes a defeat device.

**Doctor warns about lead poisoning risk from recycling older electronic equipment**

The disposal and recycling of electronic devices has increased exposure to lead and other toxicants and created "an emerging health concern," according to a pediatrician who directs the Environmental Health and Lead Clinic at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center.

In a recent Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report, published by the Centers for Disease Control, Dr. Nick Newman reports on two children, ages 1 and 2, whose father worked at an e-scrap recycling company crushing cathode ray tubes (CRTs). CRTs, made from leaded glass, were commonly used in televisions and computer monitors but largely have been replaced by newer technologies.

The children had blood lead levels of 18 micrograms per deciliter and 14 micrograms per deciliter. Although no safe blood lead level in children has been identified, a reference level of 5 micrograms per deciliter is now used to identify children for whom parents, doctors and public health officials should take action to reduce exposure to lead.

**Sweeping Away Agbogbloshie Again.**

On 20 June 2015 Ghanaian authorities, including military personnel, entered the infamous Old Fadama/Agbogbloshie site in Accra and began violently dispersing the residents of the area. If non-Ghanaians are aware of Old Fadama/Agbogbloshie at all it is probably as the purported largest e-waste dump on Earth. This is a drastically mistaken image. The evictions that began a few days ago are only the most recent event in a longer struggle over land rights in Accra that have nothing to do with where the ‘West’s’ e-waste goes to die.

The contemporary situation of Old Fadama/Agbogbloshie is long in the making. It has tangible roots in clashes between Ghanian elites and colonial administrators over land tenure between 1914-1920. Later, on the eve of independence in 1956, the land at Old Fadama/Agbogbloshie was designated as a mixed industrial site. Much later in
the 1990s Old Fadama experienced influxes of settlers pushed and pulled by a variety of struggles elsewhere in the country and within Accra itself. A key event occurred in 1991 when authorities relocated hawkers and a yam market to the area. The transportation logistics required by the relocated hawkers and yam merchants meant, among other things, that automobile, truck, and motorcycle repair services also began to cluster in the area. Soon, though, residents of the area would experience repeated eviction actions. Read More

'Fair' smartphones compared

Fairphone scores better than TCO-certified smartphones

A few days after the start of Fairphone's pre-order campaign for its Fairphone 2, Südwind, SOMO and the GoodElectronics Network are publishing a comparative review of sustainable and social standards among ‘fair’ smartphones.

“No smartphone is manufactured hundred percent fair, but Fairphone comes the closest”, says Elisabeth Schinzel of the Austrian development organisation Südwind who commissioned the report.

In May 2013, two initiatives offering a fair smartphone stepped into the spotlight. The Swedish certification body TCO Development hailed Samsung Galaxy S4 as the first green and fair produced smartphone. At the same time, the Dutch social enterprise Fairphone announced pre-orders for the first batch of Fairphones. Two years down the line, in a report entitled ‘TCO Certified Smartphones versus Fairphone. A comparison of sustainability criteria’ the two initiatives are reviewed and compared.

Fairphone - Of the 34 sustainability criteria selected by SOMO, Fairphone scored beyond current industry standards on 20 criteria. Fairphone scored particularly well in terms of responsible mining, including conflict minerals, and reducing environmental and social impacts. But they also scored well regarding e-waste measures, their multi-stakeholder approach in the supply chain to improve working conditions and transparency. Room for improvement was found in the grievance mechanisms for workers at the production sites. These and four other criteria are not met by Fairphone.

TCO-certified smartphones- TCO Certified scored beyond current industry standards on seven criteria; on 11 points they scored as being equivalent to standard industry level; and 16 of them were not addressed sufficiently.

“The fact that TCO Certified smartphones do little better than non-certified smart phones is deplorable,” said Schinzel. "Fair production must not become a PR stunt. Whoever really wants to produce in a fair way must take this seriously and work on social responsibility for the production process."

The report can be found here

The mineral sourced from illegal mines that powers your electronics

Humans and animals seem to be absent here; the forest is completely silent, as if the trees were lifeless. Then comes the first clue we are on the right track.

Suddenly -- shining under the baking Sun -- dozens of piles of a glittery, flaky mineral appear at the side of the road. The source of these stacks of this naturally occurring substance lies a little further inside the forest: hidden in the woods, small groups of miners are busy working in what look like giant rat-holes, pounding at cave walls with rudimentary tools and sorting the debris with their bare hands. Their wicker baskets are already full of the reddish, translucent sheet mineral they’re searching for. At the end of today, the few pounds they’ve earned will just be enough to provide for their families, but the
material they have mined will end up in products found in every western home.

The districts of Koderma and Giridih, in the impoverished state of Jharkhand, are home to the world's largest deposits of sheet mica, a glittery silicate that has become an essential component in thousands of products we use daily. The mineral's stability when exposed to electricity and extreme temperatures means that mica is used as an insulator in countless everyday electronic and electrical products -- including radio and TV sets, fans, microwaves, toasters, kettles and rice cookers -- as well as in heating systems. Thanks to its glitter, mica is also employed in pigments -- from car paint to cosmetic products such as mascara, foundation and face lotions -- as well as food colouring. It also finds use as a filler in cement, plastic and rubber products such as tyres. It's in technology including breathing equipment, X-ray machines, navigation compasses, atomic microscopes and missile, laser and radar systems. In the modern, technological world, mica is used pretty much everywhere. Read More

**RCA Taiwan and its victims**

IN 1969, the Radio Corporation of America (RCA), an international company from the developed world, chose Taiwan, a developing country which had lower wages but high quality labor, not to mention loose labor and environment regulations, to establish its new factory. RCA, an American company manufacturing television components, motherboards, and other electronic products, was welcomed by Taiwanese at that time, because of its international scale, advanced technology, well-known reputation, and the large number of employment opportunities it offered. Sadly, the famous company did not tell its employees that, during the process of manufacturing, large amount of dangerous chemical pollutants was used and later discharged into the air, water and ground of the RCA factory. The pollution has caused its employees to be exposed to severely toxic substances that seriously harmed their health. At least 62 employees died and 108 of them got cancer or other serious illnesses. Some female employees had miscarriages due to the pollution.

In 1987, RCA was absorbed by GE, another American company and therefore the Taiwan RCA had become a subsidiary of GE. One year later, GE sold its consumer electronics department to Thomas, a French group. Taiwan RCA has been a subsidiary of Thomas until the present. During the process of mergers and acquisition, a thorough environmental assessment report of the Taiwan factory was undertaken and circulated within the companies; therefore, both GE and Thomas were fully aware of serious pollution in the factory environment.

In 1994, the scale of pollution was finally became known to the public in Taiwan and shortly thereafter became a nationwide scandal. Taiwan government began an investigation as well as restoration on the polluted earth and water. However, after 20 years of work, the site of the Taiwan RCA is still considered a seriously polluted site.

In 1999, the suffering employees and their family had established an Association for RCA Victims and retained attorneys to file a provisional attachment in 2001. But they then realized that RCA Taiwan had transferred its property out of Taiwan for avoiding liability and compensation. Even so, in 2004, the Association still officially filed its class action against defendant companies to the cost of TWD 2.7 Billion (USD $ 87,021,000). After 10 years of harsh fighting in the courts, on April 27, 2015, Taipei District Court made the historical ruling of a decision in favor of 529 suffering plaintiffs in this kind of environmental and labor class action. The Association was granted TWD 56,4450,000 (USD18,192,223) against Taiwan RCA and Thomas by the decision, though the defendants have chosen to appeal and the case is now pending in the high court. Read More
A scientist gives back — Rahman on women’s environmental health

Rahman shared how she has combined scientific innovation and scientific research with action to solve social issues, especially woman’s issues. (Photo courtesy of Steve McCaw)

NIEHS welcomed Qamar Rahman, Ph.D., for a July 8 talk on the challenges faced by Indian women in the workplace, titled “Women! A Vulnerable Population in Occupational Settings.” Rahman highlighted her motivation to give back to her community by working to improve the occupational and environmental health of Indian women.

Dean of research science and technology at Amity University in Lucknow, India, Rahman is also the former deputy director of the Indian Institute of Toxicology Research in Lucknow. She is an expert in inhalation toxicology, especially of nanoparticles and asbestos.

“Dr. Rahman is tremendously accomplished as a scientist and a dedicated champion for women,” said Linda Birnbaum, Ph.D., director of NIEHS and the National Toxicology Program. “Her outstanding work earned her an honorary degree from Rostock University in Germany. In 600 years of the university’s history, she is the only Indian to receive such a degree. That’s quite an achievement.”

Environmental and occupational hazards

Rahman’s talk focused on occupational threats to the lung health of women, addressing three broad areas. The first was the lack of ventilation for indoor cooking. She explained that Indian women rely on the smoke to drive off mosquitos and heat the room, but breathing that smoke, from fuels such as kerosene, wood, and cow dung cakes, often leads to respiratory disease.

Next, Rahman turned to women employed in the manufacture of asbestos, a process recently banned in certain business sectors, but still occurring illegally. She said that many women develop asbestosis within 5 to 7 years of beginning such work.

Finally, Rahman discussed silicosis, a disease caused by the inhalation of silica from sand, rock, and mineral ores. She told of asking one worker, “Don’t you know this dust is toxic?” Rahman said the worker replied, “Yes, I know it well. But I do not want to die of hunger.” By Simone Otto Read More

Chrysotile Asbestos: Voices from South-East Asia

All types of asbestos cause lung cancer, mesothelioma, cancer of the larynx and ovary, and asbestosis (fibrosis of the lungs). Exposure to asbestos occurs through inhalation of fibres in air in the working environment, ambient air in the vicinity of point sources such as factories handling asbestos, or indoor air in housing and buildings containing friable (crumbly) asbestos materials. A Film depicting the hazards of Chrysotile Asbestos and the hardships faced by the victims has been made by the World Health Organisation (WHO)

Published on 11 May 2015. To watch the film Click here

Special Session on Asbestos at ICOH 2015

A special session on “Asbestos problems in Asia” was held at the International Congress on Occupational Health (ICOH) held from May 31 to June 5, 2015. The
session was moderated by Domyung Paek from the Seoul National University. Participants to the session included – Sanjiv Pandita from Asia Monitor Resource centre who spoke on the Need for Appropriate Technology to diagnose asbestos related diseases, Mohit Gupta, Coordinator ANROEV who spoke on Asbestos Problems in India-abandoned or neglected, Yeyong Choi, Asian Citizens Centre for Environment and Health who spoke on Asbestos issues after the Ban, Sugio Furuya, Japan Occupational Safety and Resource Centre who spoke on Government Responsibility for the already known Carcinogen, asbestos and Yeonsil Kang, Korea Advanced institute of Science and Technology who spoke on Science and Technology study’s insights to asbestos in Asia. For Photos visit - http://1drv.ms/1lwBbnU

Read More

The Collegium Ramazzini Releases Official Position on The Global Health Dimensions of Asbestos and Asbestos-related Diseases

18th statement of the international academy affirms long-standing position calling for a ban on all mining, manufacture and use of asbestos.

The Collegium Ramazzini (CR), an international academy of 180 scientists from 35 countries, experts in environmental and occupational health, has released an official statement on the global health dimensions of asbestos and asbestos-related diseases.

Asbestos is a proven cause of human cancer, and all forms of asbestos have been listed as definite human carcinogens by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the cancer agency of the World Health Organization. Since 1993, the Collegium Ramazzini has repeatedly called for a global ban on all mining, manufacture and use of asbestos. The Collegium has taken this position based on well-validated scientific evidence showing that all types of asbestos, including chrysotile, the most widely used form, cause cancers such as mesothelioma and lung cancer, and showing additionally that there is no safe level of exposure. The Collegium reaffirms its long-standing position that responsible public health action is to ban all extraction and use of asbestos, including chrysotile. This current statement updates earlier statements by the CR with a focus on global health dimensions of asbestos and asbestos-related diseases (ARDs).

Occupational exposure to asbestos causes an estimated 107,000 deaths each year worldwide. These deaths result from asbestos-related lung cancer (ARLC), mesothelioma and asbestosis. In countries having banned asbestos, as well as in countries still using asbestos, a large number of workers remain at high risk of developing ARDs from past exposure, in particular lung cancers and mesotheliomas. Most of these previously exposed people remain in the general population without any ongoing health monitoring. The Collegium recommends that countries develop strategies for identifying their previously and currently asbestos-exposed workers, to quantify their exposure, and register them, subsequently developing methods for continuous health surveillance and secondary prevention.

Download here:

- Related positions of the Collegium Ramazzini, including:
  - Call for an International Ban on Asbestos: Statement Update (2004)
  - Call for an International Ban on Asbestos (1999)
  - Chrysotile Asbestos as a Carcinogen (1993)

Press contact: Collegium Ramazzini, Kathryn Knowles, collegium@ramazzini.it
Articles on IBAS Website

The Beauty, the Wonder and the Solidarity of Osasco – 15 years on!

It is 15 years since that most dramatic gathering in Osasco, Brazil where asbestos workers and their families as well as asbestos activists, concerned government members, asbestos researchers and care givers came to share their life experiences. Participants from at least 30 different countries shared unbelievable stories of pain and suffering inflicted on workers and their families by international and local asbestos companies. These companies, often supported by governments, as was the case in apartheid South Africa, valued profit above basic human rights and above the equality of all human beings by treating the health and safety as well as the compensation of workers in developing countries to be of lesser importance. Amazingly, through a spirit of common humanity and in support of international solidarity people from developed and developing countries came together to enable access to social justice for asbestos exposed workers and communities.

by Dr. Sophia Kisting Read More

An Anniversary to Remember

This month we mark the 15th anniversary of the ground-breaking Global Asbestos Congress 2000: Past, Present and Future [Congresso Mundial do Amianto: Passado, Presente e Futuro] (GAC 2000) which took place over four days (September 17-20, 2000) in Latin America’s asbestos heartland 1

GAC 2000 was held in Osasco, an industrial suburb of São Paulo, a municipality that was for decades the site of Latin America’s largest asbestos-cement industrial complex. Tens of thousands of Brazilians were exposed to asbestos fibers liberated by the operations of the Eternit asbestos factory; many of them died prematurely from asbestos-related diseases. In 1995, members of the workforce in collaboration with Labor Inspector Fernanda Giannasi decided to form an asbestos victims’ support group – the Associação Brasileira dos Expostos ao Amianto [Brazilian Association of the Asbestos-Exposed] (ABREA).

In just a few short years, ABREA grew from a few members to an international force. During the 1999 meeting of the American Public Health Association, one of ABREA’s co-founders Fernanda Giannasi suggested holding an event in Osasco to bring together asbestos victims, grassroots campaigners, international experts and people from asbestos-contaminated communities. This idea was revolutionary – no one had ever attempted to convene an international meeting of individuals and communities affected by asbestos before. After a year of intense discussions, fund-raising efforts and logistical planning, GAC 2000 became a reality.

by Laurie Kazan-Allen Read More

Asbestos Perspectives: Local Endeavour, Political Impotence

Exposure to asbestos has caused a global public health disaster. In the United Kingdom, the use of seven millions tonnes of this carcinogen during the last century created the country’s worst epidemic of occupational deaths, with many more to come.

Two events in which I had some involvement last month (May 2015) revealed different aspects of society’s struggle with an unfolding tragedy. In the week before hundreds of United Nations delegates were due to gather in Geneva in what was to be a futile attempt to reduce the ease with which asbestos was traded globally, I had been invited to speak at the monthly meeting of an asbestos disease support group held in a rural English village.

by Laurie Kazan-Allen Read More

Awareness Workshop in South African Asbestos Town

On South Africa’s Youth Day (June 16, 2015), a community asbestos outreach program in the
former asbestos mining town of Kuruman brought together dozens of primary and secondary school children as well as school staff members to take part in an Asbestos Awareness Workshop. The day’s events were organized by the Asbestos Interest Group (AIG), a non-profit organization founded in 2001 by community members from the villages of Gamopedi, Ncweng, Sedibeng, Lokaleng, Gasehubane and Seven Miles in the John Taolo Gaetsewe District of the Northern Cape Province; each of these towns is suffering from high levels of asbestos-related cancers and diseases due to the Province’s asbestos legacy.

The AIG, supported by local partners and the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat (IBAS), developed activities under the “Youth Against Asbestos Project” to:

- raise asbestos awareness amongst the students in an age-appropriate manner;
- alert school managers to the hazards posed by asbestos-containing products and contamination in and around schools;
- educate participants on the region’s asbestos history, the types of asbestos-related diseases and measures for preventing hazardous exposures.

Children from eight primary and two secondary schools were invited to take part along with three principals, nine teachers, twelve school governors and a representative from the Department of Education.

Who Can be Trusted to Find Asbestos in New Zealand?

Would you entrust your new-born child to a teenage babysitter with little or no experience, and have complete piece of mind that they would take the utmost care? Probably not, right? So why entrust your asbestos survey to anyone other than someone with experience, qualifications and competency?

Currently, there is no legislative requirement for an asbestos surveyor in New Zealand to hold any form of formal qualification; however, it is “recommended” that they are “suitably competent.”

Competency covers all manner of sins; just because you know what stipple, a cement soffit and paper backed lino looks like, does not make you a competent surveyor.

by Craig Newsome Read more

Asbestos in roof sheets still a threat to workers

HA NOI (VNS) — The use of asbestos in roofing sheet plants in Viet Nam has led to severe consequences for workers’ health, a workshop in Ha Noi was told on Tuesday.

The event was co-organised by the Viet Nam Union of Science and Technology Associations (VUSTA), the Environment Health Management Department under the Health Ministry and Viet Nam Ban Asbestos Network (Vn-BAN).

"White asbestos is harmful to human health. It can cause pneumoconiosis, pleural effusion and other fatal diseases such as lung cancer, malignant mesothelioma, esophageal cancer and ovarian cancer," said Vice Chairman of VUSTA, Phan Tung Mau.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has listed asbestos among the most deadly occupational
carcinogens. It says it causes about half the cancer deaths in the workplace.

There are more than 40 factories making asbestos roofing across 23 provinces and cities nationwide. Over the last 10 years, the country has been among the world’s 10 largest users of asbestos. It consumes about 65,000 tonnes every year.

Hospital surveillance 2012 showed a high percentage of asbestos-related diseases.

Viet Nam has already taken measures to reduce the harm of asbestos to health. The use of amosite (brown asbestos) and crocidolite (blue asbestos) were prohibited in 2004. However, chrysotile (white asbestos) has yet to be banned. **VNS Read More**

**European Committees raise alarm on Europe’s silent epidemic: Asbestos-related deaths predicted to double those of road**

On 24 June 2015, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR) heard alarming testimony from some of Europe’s top experts on asbestos. From social housing to Royal housing, no property and person is immune. One expert reported during the conference on soon to be published figures placing the total number of estimated deaths in Europe at 47,000 per year, 50% higher than previously thought and double those related to road accidents.

Children and teachers in schools, DIY enthusiasts and maintenance workers are among the new risk groups joining the long list of workers and members of the public increasingly at risk from asbestos infested buildings across Europe. Although banned in 2005, asbestos is still found in many places, such as ships, trains, machinery, tunnels and in pipes in public and private water distribution networks. Asbestos was used extensively in buildings erected between 1961 and 1990, with millions of tonnes still present in buildings, not only putting building and maintenance workers at risk but potentially anybody present or occupying the property.

For the larger member states, asbestos removal programmes could cost up to €10-15 billion per country, which is equivalent to the cost of building one Channel Tunnel for each of them at today’s prices. More than 80% of schools in one country alone, the United Kingdom, still contain asbestos. Also alarming is the emerging risk for everyday consumers, either doing a bit of DIY or exposed to asbestos contaminated consumer goods, such as thermos flasks, slipping through EU Market Surveillance controls.

**Canada and asbestos**

The position of the Canadian government is the same as that of the asbestos industry: that chrysotile asbestos can be safely used and that exposure to high levels of chrysotile asbestos does not pose a risk to health.

Health experts, including the Canadian Cancer Society, have repeatedly asked Canada’s Minister of Health to protect Canadians from asbestos harm and to:

- Respect the indisputable scientific evidence and support ending the mining, use and export of asbestos
- Support revision of federal government regulations to say that there is no safe exposure level to any form of asbestos
- Assist First Nations communities to remove asbestos insulation that the federal government placed in their homes and provide compensation for the disease and death this has caused
- Create a national surveillance system to monitor asbestos-related disease in Canada
Create a national registry of buildings and other locations where asbestos is present

Remove from government websites misleading and incorrect information on asbestos risk and set up a transparent, ethical process whereby health information on government websites is reviewed by independent experts prior to being disseminated to the public

Initiate a national information campaign to inform Canadians of the continuing risks posed by all forms of asbestos, as other countries are doing

Support the provision of economic assistance and retraining to the remaining 340 asbestos miners in Quebec and their community

Kathleen Ruff, RightOnCanada.ca Read More

Gov’t eyes ban on asbestos

Cambodia may soon join other countries in banning the import and use of asbestos, which is known to have serious health consequences, officials said yesterday at a symposium organised by the Ministry of Labour and Union Aid Abroad (APHEDA), an Australian aid NGO.

Speaking at the event, Minister of Labour Ith Sam Heng said that asbestos has been used in more than 3,000 categories of products since the 1980s.

While production and use in many countries has been reduced or banned, Samheng added that asbestos is still used in many of the Kingdom’s industrial and commercial sectors, such as engineering and textiles.

“We are in the process of conducting a study, after which we will ask the government to stop the import and use of asbestos in order to ensure health security in the work place”, said Sam Heng.

Dr Leng Tong, director of the Department of Occupational Safety and Health, said that asbestos in Cambodia is mostly used in building sites and car brakes.

“Health problems caused by asbestos mostly occur among construction workers – most commonly asbestosis, mesothelioma and lung cancer,” he said.

Lak Muoy Sreang, a preventative medicine official from the Ministry of Health, said that beyond lung problems, asbestos can also cause kidney damage and cancer, as well as bladder cancer.

Read More

Sri Lanka President assures to take steps to ban import of asbestos roofing sheets by 2018

Aug 13, Colombo: Sri Lanka’s President Maithripala Sirisena has given assurance that he will discuss with the Cabinet of Ministers and arrive at a decision to ban the importation of asbestos roofing sheets into the country by the year 2018.

The President further said that he will take this decision taking into the consideration of the health and the good hygiene of the people in the country.

He made these observations delivering the keynote address at the "Sri Lanka Ceramics and Glass Symposium 2015" held in Colombo, Wednesday (12) under the theme 'Powering Growth Through Collaboration'.

President Sirisena recalled that when he was the Minister of Health he had presented several
proposals to ban the importation of asbestos roofing sheets into the country, but was unable to implement those proposals because of the protection provided by high-ranking officials of the then Government to the importers. Read more

**Time to act on work accidents**

The hunt for profit was the main driving force for labour accidents, Le The Son, Vice Chairman of the Viet Nam’s OSH Science and Technology Association told Khoa hoc va Doi song newspaper

How do you evaluate the present draft Law on Occupational Safety and Health which was recently discussed by law makers?

First of all, I should say, the compiling of a Law on Occupational Safety is of great importance. It shows the Government’s special concern over occupational safety and health for workers. Once it is approved, the law will become a legal and comprehensive instrument to protect the workers’ safety and health.

The law will have a close relationship to the Law on Food Safety and the Law on Environmental Protection. These three laws will become effective and legal tools to implement the article on the people’s right to live in a healthy environment as written in the 2013 Constitution.

Amendments were made to the draft law following consultations with scientists, managers, employers and employees and others. However, until now I still have some anxieties.

Will you please talk more specific about your anxieties?

The first thing come to my mind is the absence of responsibility by management boards in industrial parks and processing zones in the law.

Secondly, the draft law only mentions occupational safety and health for workers during work, but not employers’ responsibility towards their workers’ health after work. It is a fact that, workers working in a hazardous environment, their health will be seriously affected. In worse cases, some people will develop cancer or give birth to deformed children after a long time working in hazardous environment, for example. Read More – VNS

**Pollution from coal-fired power plants kills 4,300 Vietnamese every year: study**

Diseases linked to pollution caused by a fast growing network of coal-fired power plants kill around 4,300 people in Vietnam each year, according to a new estimate by scientists.

A study released at a conference in Hanoi on Tuesday claims that once all planned power projects become operational, the annual death count may hit 25,000.

Air pollution-related illnesses linked to power plants have been relatively well documented, but the new study also pointed out that water sources in Vietnam have also become increasingly contaminated by the waste discharged from these plants.

It singled out the Dien Vong River in the northern province of Quang Ninh, saying a local power plant has seriously polluted the river with a wide range of toxic substances.

Speaking at the conference, Tran Dinh Sinh, who runs non-profit group Green Innovation and Development, said the number of deaths caused by coal power pollution will increase, which will result in a heavier burden on the healthcare system.

Read More - By Manh Quan, Thanh Nien News, September 29, 2015

**Unilever Gets Unprotected Workers to Remove Mercury-soaked Asbestos in Kodai Factory Kodai Municipality**
Stops Unilever’s Unauthorised Works on Site

23 September, 2015: Barely a week before Unilever CEO Paul Polman is to get UN’s Champion of the Earth Award, the company’s Indian subsidiary has been caught engaging unprotected contract workers to remove carcinogenic asbestos roofing at its controversial Kodaikanal factory site.

Over the last month, Unilever has engaged unprotected workers in hazardous work on two occasions. Last month, it sent workers with only hard hats and blue cotton uniforms to dismantle broken mercury-soaked asbestos roofing with no authorisation from any authority and no oversight from environmental or labour safety regulators. According to company sources who spoke to members of the ex-workers association, this work was carried out after a tree fell and damaged a portion of the factory roof. Since, Kodaikanal workers are now aware of the dangers of mercury, the current work is being carried out by contract workers from outside Tamil Nadu. Asbestos is a carcinogen that is banned in 56 countries, according to a compilation by the International Ban Asbestos Secretariat. Dismantling and disposal of asbestos is a highly specialised exercise requiring trained personnel, full body suits and special decontamination chambers. Exposure to asbestos dust can cause mesothelioma — a cancer of the mesothelial tissue that covers the internal organs of the body. The photographs below show the care with which asbestos is removed and contained in western countries. The manner in which the sheets. Read More

Financing Healthcare for All in India: Towards a Common Goal

This paper explores available evidence, contextualises and maps the debate in India around financing healthcare for all. While the focus is on healthcare in response to current policy debates, Oxfam India recognises the crucial importance of adopting a holistic approach to health, addressing factors such as nutrition and sanitation, and broader social determinants of health. Read More

National Family Health Survey

Serious Violations of Workers’ Rights

The death of the four workers and injury to two others on 12 May 2015 in Karnataka brings to the forefront the harsh and unsafe working conditions under which the workers “contracted” under the private “Field Agency,” Vimarsh, worked and continue to work for the Fourth Round of the National Family Health Survey. The NFHS-4 is being conducted under the stewardship of the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, with the International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, serving as the nodal agency for field operations. There is an urgent need to set up an independent process for investigating labour violations as well as the quality of data collected through such contractual arrangements with private FAs in the ongoing NFHS.

Sylvia Karpagam (sakie339@gmail.com) is a public health physician who was employed as the Clinical Anthropometric and Biochemical trainer with Vimarsh in Karnataka for eight months and resigned on 6 January 2015 because of large-scale violations by the agency. C Sathyamala (csathyamala@gmail.com) is an epidemiologist and public health physician.

Acknowledgements are due to Maitreyi Krishnan, Akhila Vasan and Bijoya Roy for their comments on a draft version of this article.

In the early hours of 12 May 2015, four persons died and two others sustained grievous injuries as a result of a head-on collision between a lorry and a Tata Sumo on the NH-13 near Amlapur village in Kudligi taluk in Bellari, Karnataka (Ahiraj 2015)[ii]. While this “news” may seem like one of the many road accidents that has come to typify modernising India, it hides a much more sinister story of a series of
violations and grievous negligence under the Fourth Round of the National Family Health Survey (NFHS-4) undertaken by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare (MoHFW), Government of India. Three of those who were killed (all women) and the two who were injured (both men), were workers under the NFHS-4 and died/injured while on fieldwork. The tragic loss of lives and probable permanent disabilities are the culmination of the harsh working conditions imposed on the workers by the Field Agency (FA) operationalising data collection for the NFHS-4 in Karnataka. Read More

**IOSH discussion: Towards Ethical Fashion 2020**

Baroness Young of Hornsey, co-chair of the APPG on Ethics and Sustainability in Fashion, was among the speakers at a recent parliamentary event examining transparency in fashion supply chains

Disasters such as the collapse of Rana Plaza in Bangladesh have led to increased transparency around supply chains. But there is still further to go, according the parliamentarians, campaigners and members of the fashion industry who gathered in the House of Lords to discuss the next steps.

The event, ‘Ethical Fashion 2020, a new vision for Transparency?’, culminated in a parliamentary drinks reception.

Prior to this, an expert panel evaluated the role played by the industry, politicians, professionals and others in promoting sustainable safety and health in supply chains.

IOSH chief executive Jan Chmiel opened the event by highlighting the group’s focus on transparency in supply chains to ensure factory workers being “out of sight does not mean out of mind”.

Also at the outset, Fashion Revolution founder Carry Somers called for regulation on firms to go beyond relying solely on corporate social responsibility.

Panel debate chair and Observer journalist Lucy Siegle then called on the panelists to outline their vision for transparency by 2020. by Sebastian Whale / 06 Jul 2015 Read More

**Taiwan deports Korean workers protesting over factory closure**

South Korean workers protesting against the closure of a Taiwan-owned electronics factory in Korea were deported from Taipei on 10 June, in a rare cross-border labour dispute that has already led to the death of one the workers.

Taiwanese union activists supporting the Korean workers at Taipei’s central city airport shouted slogans and scuffled with police, who were escorting the 11 workers onto a plane bound for Seoul. The Korean workers had arrived in Taiwan in late May to protest over the closure of a flat-panel display screen factory owned by the unlisted Hydis Technologies Co Ltd, a subsidiary of Taiwan's E Ink Holdings Inc, which is majority-owned by Taiwan's YFY Inc. The Korean workers had been staging a sit-in in front of the Taipei residence of S.C. Ho, son of YFY's founder and one of its major shareholders, demanding the factory be reopened and its some 400 staff re-hired. Two of the protesters were entering the sixth day of a hunger strike. One worker had already committed suicide in Korea in response to the closure.

"All we wanted was to come out and speak to us in person," Lee Sang-mok, one of the Korean workers, told reporters before being escorted onto the aircraft. In a news conference held on Wednesday to address the controversy, E Ink's chairman, Frank Ko, said its Hydis factory in South Korea had booked losses of around T$6 billion ($194 million) since being acquired in 2008. "Given the financial reality, we had no choice but to close the factory," Ko said. The company said it had regularly increased workers' pay despite the sustained losses and had held numerous negotiations with unions during the closure process. E Ink produces displays for so-called
Informal Workers’ Access to Healthcare

This video by WIEGO and partners, Asiye eTafuleni (AeT) in South Africa; HomeNet Thailand; and the Self-Employed Women's Association in India tells the stories of informal workers and the difficulties they face in accessing health services in their respective countries. It also presents some of the solutions that each of these organizations has developed to mitigate against these barriers to access. Watch Video

Global, regional, and national comparative risk assessment of 79 behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks or clusters of risks in 188 countries, 1990–2013: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2013

Background - The Global Burden of Disease, Injuries, and Risk Factor study 2013 (GBD 2013) is the first of a series of annual updates of the GBD. Risk factor quantification, particularly of modifiable risk factors, can help to identify emerging threats to population health and opportunities for prevention. The GBD 2013 provides a timely opportunity to update the comparative risk assessment with new data for exposure, relative risks, and evidence on the appropriate counterfactual risk distribution.

Methods - Attributable deaths, years of life lost, years lived with disability, and disability-adjusted life-years (DALYs) have been estimated for 79 risks or clusters of risks using the GBD 2010 methods. Risk–outcome pairs meeting explicit evidence criteria were assessed for 188 countries for the period 1990–2013 by age and sex using three inputs: risk exposure, relative risks, and the theoretical minimum risk exposure level (TMREL). Risks are organised into a hierarchy with blocks of behavioural, environmental and occupational, and metabolic risks at the first level of the hierarchy. The next level in the hierarchy includes nine clusters of related risks and two individual risks, with more detail provided at levels 3 and 4 of the hierarchy. Compared with GBD 2010, six new risk factors have been added: handwashing practices, occupational exposure to trichloroethylene, childhood wasting, childhood stunting, unsafe sex, and low glomerular filtration rate. For most risks, data for exposure were synthesised with a Bayesian meta-regression method, DisMod-MR 2.0, or spatial-temporal Gaussian process regression. Relative risks were based on meta-regressions of published cohort and intervention studies. Attributable burden for clusters of risks and all risks combined took into account evidence on the mediation of some risks such as high body-mass index (BMI) through other risks such as high systolic blood pressure and high cholesterol.

Findings - All risks combined account for 57.2% (95% uncertainty interval [UI] 55.8–58.5) of deaths and 41.6% (40.1–43.0) of DALYs. Risks quantified account for 87.9% (86.5–89.3) of cardiovascular disease DALYS, ranging to a low of 0% for neonatal disorders and neglected tropical diseases and malaria. In terms of global DALYs in 2013, six risks or clusters of risks each caused more than 5% of DALYS: dietary risks accounting for 11·3 million deaths and 241·4 million DALYs, high systolic blood pressure for 10·4 million deaths and 208·1 million DALYs, child and maternal malnutrition for 1·7 million deaths and 176·9 million DALYs, tobacco smoke for 6·1 million deaths and 143·5 million DALYs, air pollution for 5·5 million deaths and 141·5 million DALYs, and high BMI for 4·4 million deaths and 134·0 million DALYs. Risk factor patterns vary across regions and countries and with time. In sub-Saharan Africa, the leading risk factors are child and maternal malnutrition, unsafe sex, and unsafe water,
sanitation, and handwashing. In women, in nearly all countries in the Americas, North Africa, and the Middle East, and in many other high-income countries, high BMI is the leading risk factor, with high systolic blood pressure as the leading risk in most of Central and Eastern Europe and south and east Asia. For men, high systolic blood pressure or tobacco use are the leading risks in nearly all high-income countries, in North Africa and the Middle East, Europe, and Asia. For men and women, unsafe sex is the leading risk in a corridor from Kenya to South Africa.

Funding - Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

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**Powerful video about the impact of exposure to chemicals**

It’s the summer of 1979. Yvette is 22 years old and five months pregnant. She and her husband David have no idea what’s coming.

Mark Rueda Flores was delivered at the Kaiser Permanente Santa Clara Medical Center on December 3, 1979. There were many problems from the start: His eyes were crossed. His testicles had failed to descend. His hips were dislocated. He was unable to suck on a breast or bottle. His head was covered with large blood blisters, known as hematomas.

By the time Mark was 4, it was clear that he was profoundly disabled. He was still crawling. He wasn’t talking normally. “The words were coming out like a foreign language,” Yvette said.

In December, Mark turned 35. He is six feet tall. Before he had gall bladder surgery last summer he weighed nearly 400 pounds. He speaks mostly in monosyllables, often repeating the last word or phrase his mother says. He watches Sesame Street on a loop and likes trains, forklifts and Chuck E. Cheese. Not long ago, he learned to draw a circle.

For the first 29 years of Mark’s life, Yvette had no reason to suspect his condition was the product of anything other than misfortune. Had she not heard a radio ad 6 ½ years ago, she might believe that still.

The ad was sponsored by a law firm. As Yvette remembers it, the announcer asked, “Have you worked in the electronics industry? Do you have a child with these defects?” Yvette: “I go, ‘Yeah, yeah.’ ” She wrote down the phone number and called a few days later.

**Risks to workers and their offspring**

When it comes to protection against toxic hazards, workers in America are treated differently — that is to say, more callously — than the general public. This legal disparity allows someone who toils inside a factory to face higher risks of cancer and other maladies than someone who lives just beyond the plant fence.

The damage, it turns out, isn’t confined to the workers themselves. Building on science more than a century old, recent studies have found ties between parental exposures and childhood afflictions such as brain tumors, malformations and learning disabilities. A bicoastal consortium of tort lawyers has begun targeting electronics manufacturers, blaming chemical-intensive processes for skeletal abnormalities, developmental delays, heart defects and other problems in workers’ children.

The little-publicized litigation comes on the heels of hundreds of lawsuits filed against IBM Corporation and its chemical suppliers in the late 1990s on behalf of cancer-stricken workers and their injured offspring. It raises questions about the control of
teratogens — substances, such as lead, which can interfere with tightly sequenced fetal development — in the workplace.

Across all industries, air samples testing positive for lead by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration from 1984 through 2013 exceeded the exposure limit 40 percent of the time, a Center for Public Integrity analysis shows. Just how many workers have been exposed to unsafe levels of lead in electronics manufacturing is unclear because the sampling was so much more limited. Read More

Labour Day Special: Coal Ministry plans 'zero harm' policy for mine workers

Taking up the most neglected and sensitive topic in the coal mining sector — safety of mine labours, the ministry of coal is working towards ‘zero harm’ policy and coal companies would increase revenue spend on it.

The plan also includes phasing out of all manual loading in underground coal mines within a year’s time. Most accidents in an underground coal mine happen due to land slide or gas leakage during extracting coal which is usually fatal.

In a representation made by labour unions, coal companies and ministry officials, the minister of coal Piyush Goyal emphasized on ‘zero tolerance’ for breach of workers' safety and said that all efforts must be made to ensure that there would be no compromise on workers safety.

“In view of the target of 1 billion tonnes for coal production in India, standards of safety must be improved further. He clarified that high production level must be achieved without compromising workers' safety and health” said the minutes of the meeting of standing committee on mine safety.

Read More

Illegal gold mining pollutes environment in Cao Bang

CAO BANG (VNS) — Illegal gold mining along the Hien River section flowing through Thach An and Nguyen Binh districts in Cao Bang Province has severely polluted the local environment over the last month.

A Viet Nam News Agency (VNA) report yesterday said the river has become very muddy as several groups of people (around 10 each) used excavators and water pumps to dig a hole with a circumference of about 100sq.m near the Nam Dang stream.

Some groups were also using small automobiles to transport soil dug from the stream to other places to sift for gold, a VNA correspondent found.

Dinh Huu Thong, chairman of the Minh Khai Commune People’s Committee in Thach An District, said illegal gold exploitation has been happening in the two districts for the last 10 years.

In 2012, the provincial People’s Committee had issued an instruction banning the activity, and different agencies in the province, including police and local administrations, had joined areas to carry out raids.

The illegal exploitation was temporarily controlled, and commune administrations had asked residents to sign a commitment not to repeat their violations. But the illegal exploitation had resumed about a month ago.

Thong said, adding that his administration did not have the authority or resources to deal with the issue on its own right.

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