

**U.S. Department of Labor**

Deputy Under Secretary for  
International Affairs  
Washington, D.C. 20210



DEC 15 2003

Mr. Garrett Brown  
Coordinator  
Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network  
P.O. Box 124  
Berkeley, California 94701-0124

Dear Mr. Brown:

Thank you for your letter concerning submission 2000-01 before the U.S. National Administration Office (NAO) under the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation (NAALC). As the Secretary's representative in charge of international affairs, I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond.

You are correct in your assessment that, in its report on submission 2000-01, the U.S. NAO expressed concerns about the Government of Mexico's occupational safety and health inspection, verification and monitoring processes. It is as a result of this assessment that the U.S. Government sought and received Mexico's and Canada's support for the establishment of the Trinational Occupational Safety and Health Working Group. It is our belief that this Working Group serves as an important conduit for addressing workplace safety and health issues and is a tangible step in our desire to improve cooperation between our governments on these issues.

As you are aware, the Working Group began its work in the Summer of last year and has already undertaken several efforts to address the Government of Mexico's ability to effectively enforce its occupational safety and health laws. The U.S. Department of Labor funded two training courses for Mexican federal and local occupational safety and health inspectors on fire safety and electrical generation. The Working Group conducted trinational seminars on best practices in the manufacturing (focusing on the automotive industry) and construction sectors in Mexico City in June and August 2003, both of which included business and labor participants. Additionally, the Working Group organized a workshop in Mexico City on implementation of the Globally Harmonized System for the Classification and Labeling of Chemicals, which involved Mexican agencies responsible for the handling of hazardous substances including labor and social welfare, communications, transportation, health, and foreign affairs. In March 2003, the Working Group conducted a seminar in Ciudad Juarez and El Paso on the importance of voluntary protection programs.

For the coming year, the Working Group is discussing two additional training courses for Mexican inspectors on machine guarding and pressure vessels (boilers), as well as a seminar on ergonomic best practices in the automotive industry. In order to further publicize the Working Group's efforts and improve public participation, we hope to launch a trinational website in the near future. The website will have links to occupational safety and health information from all three countries and will include postings on the efforts of the Working Group, thereby increasing public review and participation.

As in all of our cooperative efforts, we are mindful of the importance of input into the Working Group process by labor, industry, and other interested parties and the Working Group members continue to seek ways to involve labor and business representatives in their efforts as appropriate. In this regard, we believe that your suggestion that a fifth subgroup be created specifically for this purpose is an interesting one and are raising this possibility with the Working Group's Mexican and Canadian participants. It has always been our view that the likelihood of successful government compliance and other preventative efforts are enhanced by participation of the relevant stakeholders and an important purpose of our involvement in the Working Group is the development of a process to engage labor and industry experts in all three countries in our efforts to improve occupational safety and health conditions. A subgroup providing for the relevant stakeholders to have input into the development of, and to participate in, our cooperative projects could be a beneficial addition to the Working Group's efforts.

In order to keep abreast of our continuing efforts in the Working Group, I suggest that you remain in contact with the U.S. NAO. You may also contact me directly if you so desire.

Sincerely,

Arnold Levine

cc: Monica Schurtman