

Border/Line Health & Safety

NEWSLETTER OF THE MAQUILADORA HEALTH & SAFETY SUPPORT NETWORK

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Letter from the Coordinator

By Garrett Brown

We're back! Actually we never left, but we did run out of money to continue printing and mailing the newsletter. So we are bringing back the newsletter as an all-electronic, email-delivered publication that we plan to send you in February, May and October of this year and all those following. We also want to encourage other Network volunteers to contribute articles — as is the case below with Betty Szudy's report on last fall's ANROAV conference in the Philippines — so please give a thought to writing an article or opinion piece.

Like other anti-sweatshop organizations around the world, our Network has had serious difficulty in raising money for projects since 2005. Some of our previous funders decided to

change the focus of their grants, as funders do from time to time, from global labor issues to HIV/AIDS or climate change projects. Other funders have cut back on grants altogether.

In any case, the various sources of financing we've had since 1993 have largely dried up and it has become impossible for the Network to mount any self-funded projects since the December 2004 training in Guatemala of Central American unions and labor rights groups. Our next international project, which started in the fall of 2007 at the Cananea open-pit copper mine in Mexico, has been funded by donations from the United Steel Workers union.

As a result of this new funding landscape, we have fine-tuned our project and financing
(See **Letter**, page 2)

MHSSN Training at ANROAV's 2008 Conference

By Betty Szudy

In September 2008, MHSSN volunteers Betty Szudy and Valeria Velazquez went to the Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational Accident Victims (ANROAV) annual conference in the Philippines. ANROAV had asked the MHSSN to lead a training session about health and safety hazards in the electronics industry. Velazquez currently works as a labor coordinator/trainer for the Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) at UC Berkeley; Szudy is a former LOHP staffer who conducted health and safety training in both Indonesia and China as part of MHSSN/LOHP's work in those countries between 1998-2005.

ANROAV is a unique mutual solidarity group and workers' rights organization that works for the health and safety rights of the victims

and workers in the Asian region, with 22 affiliated organizations in 14 countries. ANROAV combines the struggle for occupational safety and health in different Asian countries into one united struggle and demands better health and safety for the workers across the region. Over 100 participants attended the ANROAV conference from different Asian countries/territories including India, China, Bangladesh, Nepal, Macau, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Laos and Vietnam. ANROAV supporters from the United States and Canada also participated.

The involvement of workplace accident victims from different countries added a powerful presence to the conference. Activists at the September meeting included a Chinese con-

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strategy to look for strategic partners in the developing world who stand a better chance of receiving grants than a US-based organization. Our partners can design occupational health and safety (OHS) projects meeting their needs, we can contribute expertise for specific aspects of the project, and the partner organization can seek, receive and control the funding for the project.

To this end we have strengthened our relations with the Asian Monitor Resource Center (AMRC) in Hong Kong and the Asia Network for the Rights of Occupational Accident Victims (ANROAV), a pan-Asia network based in the Philippines. We are also looking to renew ties with organizations working with Mexican maquiladora workers along the US-Mexico border.

In addition, we are looking to partner with US-based institutions that we have worked with in the past that may have more access to resources than we do at present. These include the Labor Occupational Health Program (LOHP) and Labor Occupational Safety and Health (LOSH) here in California, and the Developing World Outreach Initiative (DWOI) of the Northern California Section of the American Industrial Hygiene Association.

The need for OHS resources among grassroots, worker-oriented OHS groups around the world remains as great as ever. Many of these groups in Mexico and Asia have experienced their own financial problems of late, but our hope is that together we can develop and fund key OHS projects. These efforts are all the more needed during times of eco-

nomics crisis and ever-stronger downward pressure on working conditions and workers' rights throughout the global economy.

Moreover, it's never been more obvious that bad working conditions in the developing world's workplaces undermine working conditions in the US and other developed economies that have to compete in a "race to the bottom" for the lowest-cost production with every other factory in the global economy.

If you have some time, energy and the willingness to share your skills and expertise with workers in the developing world, please contact MHSSN coordinator Garrett Brown [garrettdbrown@comcast.net] to get put on the list of "active volunteers" for upcoming projects. ■

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struction worker who became a paraplegic after a serious fall; a Chinese trade unionist who had acid thrown at him due to his union activities, resulting in serious burns and disfigurement all over his body; workers from India exposed to asbestos and now developing lung diseases; and electronics workers from Korea

and China exposed to cadmium. Despite their injuries and illnesses, these workers have been leading activists in pan-Asian campaigns for safer workplaces.

The ANROAV meeting focused on three key themes: 1) sharing information about critical issues in occupational health and safety in Asia, and developing campaigns to address them; 2) strategies to strengthen ANROAV as a network; and 3) how to create and strengthen fruitful

partnerships with similar networks across the globe. The meeting agenda consisted of open plenary sessions combined with four simultaneous thematic "skills share" workshops to make discussions more focused and strategic.

A skills share workshop on OSH hazards in the electronics industry was taught by Szudy, Velazquez and Ted Smith from the Electronics Take Back

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The Support Network has an extensive Reading and Resource List posted on the web site: www.igc.org/mhssn



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Coalition, a group focused on requiring manufacturers to take responsibility for their electronic products from cradle to grave. Smith is also a founder of the Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, an activist group in Santa Clara County, California, that was one of the first to focus on the hazards facing workers and communities from the electronics industry. The workshop engaged participants in learning and sharing information about the lifecycle of electronics (80 percent of e-waste now being sent to American recyclers is exported to Asia), learning more about specific toxic chemicals used in electronics, controlling hazards and drawing up action plans to carry out future activities.

Workshop participants came up with a series of recommendations for ANROAV to further support worker empowerment in the electronics industry as a result of the workshop. The participants proposed:

- ANROAV become the information hub for an email list serve on chemical hazards in the electronics industry, with a priority on finding simple fact sheets and translating them into other Asian languages and pictorial information;
- ANROAV expand the health and safety manual developed by MHSSN and LOHP by holding more grass-roots training in various countries and incorporating experiences and information obtained from the “ground up”.

Small groups within the workshop came up with their own action plans as well. The Korean electronics workers and SHARP (Support for Health and Right of People in Semi-conductor Industry) focused on raising awareness of Samsung workers about job hazards, including setting up small public displays on victims and struggle and creating a blog on their experiences incorporating workshop materials.

The community based groups from Bhopal focused on integrating information into the 25th anniversary Bhopal commemorative actions and sharing it

with community members by making a video that featured children and families talking about the impact chemicals have had in terms of reproductive hazards.

The Chinese activists committed to take the information back to the 80 volunteers involved in their worker center in Qingdao and do awareness trainings on chemical hazards.

The ANROAV meeting closed with a discussion of overall campaigns the organization is working on, including dust-related diseases, electronics, mining, victims organizing, migrant worker issues, and the campaigns of Unilever workers and Bhopal victims.

Sanjiv Pandita, who is a former coordinator of ANROAV and the current Executive Director of the Asian Monitor Resource Center in Hong Kong, led the plenary discussion on proposed Asia-wide ANROAV campaigns. Pandita first attended health and safety trainings conducted by the MHSSN and the Labor

Occupational Health Program in 2000 in Jakarta, Indonesia, and he credited this training with galvanizing his interest to do more work organizing around workplace safety throughout Asia. Under the leadership of Pandita, his successor Jagdish Patel from India, and the current ANROAV coordinator Noel Corea in the Philippines, ANROAV has grown from a small group of activists with a passion and vision about OSH to an effective, inspiring network of workers, community and union activists, and international solidarity groups.

ANROAV will hold its next annual meeting in September 2009. MHSSN members are encouraged to attend and participate in follow-up educational activities. For more information about ANROAV's goals and activities, go to their web-site at www.anroav.org. For additional information about occupational hazards facing electronics workers, contact Valeria Velazquez at LOHP; vvelazquez@berkeley.edu. ■

NETWORKING NOTES

- The March 2009 issue of Canada's Maquila Solidarity Network newsletter has a report on the latest unsuccessful effort to make the “labor side agreement” of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) actually protect workers. The article details how workers at the Johnson Controls, Matamoros Garment and Tarrant Ajalpan maquiladoras in Mexico filed complaints under NAFTA and years later are still waiting for justice. The newsletter available is available at: <http://en.maquilasolidarity.org/en/node/853>.
- In October 2008, the Network organized a tour of Tijuana for participants in the annual meeting of the American Public Health Association. The tour was to be hosted by the CITTAC workers center and the community environmental group in Colonia Chilpancingo, both in Tijuana. Unfortunately, the tour had to be cancelled just four days before the event because of the rising tide of drug-related violence on the streets of Tijuana. Tour participants generously donated the cost of their tickets to the two groups, providing a \$1,900 contribution.
- MHSSN Coordinator Brown was one of the keynote speakers at the annual Professional Conference in Industrial Hygiene in Tampa, FL, in November 2008. Brown's talk on “Genuine Worker Participation — An Indispensable Key to Effective Global OHS,” is posted on the Network's website and will be published in the spring 2009 issue of the journal *New Solutions*.
- Coordinator Garrett Brown represented the MHSSN at the Mexico City conference of the bi-national Enlace organization based in Portland, OR, in March 2008; and at a special seminar on China at the *Labor Notes* conference in Detroit in April 2008.

Ongoing OHS Project at Cananea Copper Mine

In July 2007, the 1,200 miners and processing plant workers at the giant open-pit copper mine in Cananea, Mexico, just 35 miles south of the Arizona border, went on strike over concerns about unsafe and unhealthy working conditions. In March 2009, the miners are still on strike against the transnational Grupo Mexico that has operated the mine since it was privatized in the mid-1990s.

In the fall of 2007, the MHSSN was approached by the United Steel Workers union about putting together a team of volunteers to do a health screening of striking miners and an evaluation of working conditions in the idle mine and processing plants. In less than two weeks, a team of eight OHS professionals volunteered to travel to Cananea.

The OHS survey team included physicians Robert Cohen from Chicago, Marian Fierro and Octavio Castro of Mexico; pulmonary technician Moises Ortega from Chicago; nurse Heather Barr from San Francisco; and three industrial hygienists, Enrique Medina and Garrett Brown from California, and Ingrid Zubieta, originally from Colombia and now in Los Angeles.

The team spent four days in Cananea in October 2007, conducting intensive work-history interviews, spirometry lung tests and medical consults with 70 miners from various departments of the facility. The team also spent four hours inspecting the mine and several ore-processing plants. The survey team's travel expenses were paid by USW Local 675 in Carson, California, while all the professionals donated their time.

The survey team issued a preliminary report in November 2007 and a final report in January 2008 (both are posted on the MHSSN website). The preliminary report was announced at a press conference in Mexico City on November 12, 2007, by Dr. Cohen and Brown, who were joined by officials of the USW union from Pittsburgh and leaders of the Mexican Miners union. The Mexican and U.S. union officials, Cohen and Brown also met

with high-ranking officials from Mexico's Department of Labor (STPS) on the day the preliminary report was released.

MHSSN Coordinator Garrett Brown presented the results of the survey to a national Mexican Miners union rally in Cananea in February 2008, and to a USW health and safety conference in Pittsburgh in August 2008.

What the OHS survey team found in Cananea was that workers in the ore-processing "concentrator" plants were exposed to respirable silica dust levels at least 10 times greater than Mexico's law allows. Exposure to silica dust can cause fatal diseases such as silicosis and lung

cancer. The medical tests indicated an elevated level of respiratory illness symptoms among workers in "high dust" areas.

Workers were also exposed to high levels of sulfuric acid mist and lead dust in other processing areas. There were numerous serious safety hazards observed on site, including unguarded moving

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Recent MHSSN Articles

While full-blown international trainings have not been possible over the last several years for lack of funding, we have tried to keep the issues of workplace safety in the developing world in the public eye through articles in both peer-reviewed and trade publications.

A short list of articles written by Coordinator Garrett Brown, all posted on the MHSSN website, includes:

- "China proposes worker protection law; Multinational corporations loudly protest," *Industrial Safety and Hygiene News*, May 2007.
- "Corporate Social Responsibility Brings Limited Progress on Workplace Safety in Global Supply Chains," *Occupational Hazards*, August 2007.
- "Lean Manufacturing Comes to China: A Case Study of Its Impact on Workplace Health and Safety," Garrett D. Brown and Dara O'Rourke, *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health*, V. 13, No. 3 (July-September 2007).
- "International OHS Through the Looking Glass of the Global Economy: Multinational OHS Team at Cananea, Mexico, Copper Mine," *Occupational Hazards*, January 2008.
- "Perils of a schizoid business model, Safety suffers in 'race to the bottom,'" *Industrial Safety and Industrial Hygiene News*, September 2008
- "Cananea Copper Mine; An International Effort to Improve Hazardous Working Conditions in Mexico," Ingrid X. Zubieta, Garrett Brown, Robert Cohen and Enrique Medina, *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health*, V. 15, No. 1 (January-March 2009).

Capacity-Building Efforts with Asian Partners

In an effort to build the capacity of partner organizations in Asia, the Network has funded leaders of key grassroots workplace safety groups to attend professional OHS workshops in Shenzhen and Shanghai in China. Golder Associates consulting firm generously offered half-price seats for two non-governmental organizations (NGOs) for multi-day trainings on general industrial hygiene in Shenzhen and industrial ergonomics in Shanghai last fall.

The MHSSN paid for the participation of leaders of the Asian Network for the Rights of Occupational Accident Victims (ANROAV), the Asian Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC), the China Labor Support Network (CLSN), and a local Shanghai workers center.

Golder has renewed its offer of discounted fees for NGO staff members in 2009 training sessions, including workshops to be held in India as well as China.

The Network also worked with the “Developing World Outreach Initiative” (DWOI) of the Northern California section of the American Industrial Hygiene Association to sponsor leaders of ANROAV and AMRC for “international affiliate memberships” to the national AIHA in 2008 and 2009. This special class of AIHA membership allows international OHS professionals and activists to access AIHA publications and resources. ■

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machine parts, high-voltage electrical hazards and fall hazards.

The OHS survey team’s findings were consistent with the results of inspections conducted by the STPS in April 2007 and February 2008. After the April 2007 site inspection, the STPS issued 72 separate correction orders, including ordering Grupo Mexico to repair malfunctioning brakes on 10-ton and 15-ton cranes; to re-assemble the plant ventilation system designed to remove airborne, silica-containing dust; and to guard energized electrical circuits and moving machine parts. The STPS ordered an additional 264 corrective actions in 2008 in an “extraordinary inspection” that followed the release of the MHSSN team’s reports.

Grupo Mexico has battled the Miners union for several years in Cananea and at other unionized facilities in Mexico. About two years prior to the strike, the company physically disassembled the processing plants’ ventilation systems and laid them on the ground by the buildings. This meant that workers were exposed to dense clouds of rock dust, which an analysis conducted by three US laboratories showed was 23% crystalline silica with 51% of sampled dust in the respirable particle size range. Grupo Mexico has also failed to meet the requirements of Mexican law for control of recognized hazards, for medical surveillance of exposed workers, and for safety training of workers.

The Mexican miners union, the USW and our Network are currently in the process of writing a complaint under the labor side agreement of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) charging that the STPS has failed to enforce its own regulations at the Cananea mine, threatening the safety and health of the Mexican miners. The NAFTA complaint will be submitted in this spring and may result in a public hearing on the case.

Depending on the outcome of the strike in Cananea, additional OHS projects to protect miners on site are likely. Network members interested in working on any follow-up projects should contact MHSSN Coordinator Brown.

The OHS survey team’s work has been covered by *Occupational Hazards* magazine in January 2008, and in a January 2009 article in the *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health*. ■

New Publications and Website Resources

The MHSSN website has been updated with resources lists of key articles, books and reports over the last two years related to occupational safety and health in China and Mexico, factory reports from China and other parts of the global economy, “corporate social responsibility” and codes of conduct, and global development and poverty issues.

There continues to be a river of information about working conditions in the developing world, only a portion of which can be captured in the resource lists on our website. For a short list of essential books to understand OHS issues in their global context, the following is a good start:

- *The China Price, The true costs of Chinese competitive advantage*, by Alexandra Harney, Penguin Press, 2008;
- *The Enclave Economy: Foreign investment and sustainable development in Mexico’s Silicon Valley*, by Kevin Gallagher and Lyuba Zarsky, MIT Press, 2008;
- *Social Responsibility in the Global Apparel Industry*, by Marsha Dickson, Suzanne Loker and Molly Eckman, Fairchild Books, 2009;
- *Everybody Wins, except for most of us; What economics teaches about globalization*, by Josh Bivens, Economic Policy Institute, 2008;
- *Illegal People: How globalization creates migration and criminalizes immigrants*, by David Bacon, Beacon Press, 2008.

Special Global Supply Chains Panel Series at AIHce 09

A special set of panels on improving working conditions in global supply chains will be held on Tuesday, June 2nd in Toronto, Canada, as part of the annual American Industrial Hygiene Conference & Exhibition. The goal of the panels, to be followed by a networking reception, is to involve industrial hygienists in projects to improve factory conditions in the developing world.

The first panel at 10:30 am is titled "Global Supply Chains and Social Responsibility: The Health and Safety Issues." Speakers will include Edward Quevedo, the keynote speaker of the morning General Session; David Stangis (Campbell Inc.), Garrett Brown (MHSSN), Janice Camp (University of Washington), and John Mulhausen (3M Inc.)

The second panel at 2 pm is titled "Global Supply Chains and Social Responsibility: Lessons Learned and IH Activism." Speakers will include Ashay Ajgaonkar (Applied Materials Inc.); Lynda Yanz (Maquila Solidarity Network), Maharshi Mehta (ISS-India), Mark Katchen (Phylmar Group Inc.), Scott Nova (Workers Rights Consortium), and Richard Hirsh (Stiefel Laboratories Inc.).

The reception after the afternoon session will provide an opportunity for AIHCE participants to interact with the speakers and learn about possibilities to volunteer time and expertise for projects and campaigns in the developing world.

Antonio Villalba — ¡Presente!

In October 2008, Mexican workers lost a tireless fighter for safe workplaces, among other key labor rights, in the death of Antonio Villalba. Villalba was a leader of one of the few independent, member-controlled unions in Mexico, the Frente Autentico de Trabajo (FAT). Active in the union since the 1970s, he was a local union leader in Chihuahua who became a key national leader of the FAT in Mexico City, and then known internationally as very smart, totally committed, and wickedly funny professional organizer dedicated to Mexico's workers.

MHSSN members had the privilege and opportunity to work closely with Antonio in the mid-1990s when we

conducted a series of health and safety trainings with FAT unions in Mexico and at the FAT-sponsored workers center in Ciudad Juarez. Antonio was also a devoted husband and father who was kind enough to host MHSSN trainers in his home for long, festive dinners in the Mexican tradition.

Although Antonio ultimately lost his battle with cancer, he never lost his indomitable spirit, fierce determination for justice, and engaging sense of humor. His was a life well lived for a worthy cause which he aided immensely. We should all be so lucky. We send our heartfelt condolences to Antonio's family and his compañeros at FAT. ■

Quotes of the Month

From China:

"The government of agricultural Henan province announced that 3.7 million jobless migrants recently returned. In industrial Guangdong province, by contrast, more than 600,000 migrants have left for home, and the provincial governor says another 1 million could leave in coming months as more business close or lay off employees. Some observers are worried that an army of unemployed workers could spark widespread social unrest... "These are people who feel they have nothing to lose, because there's nothing for them. The government is really aware of that."

— Anna Mehler Paperny, "China's migrant workers cut loose," *San Francisco Chronicle*, January 23, 2009.

From Mexico:

"About 30 million Mexicans survive on less than 30 pesos per day — not quite \$3. The minimum wage is 45 pesos a day. The Mexican federal government estimates that 37.7 percent of its 106 million citizens — 40 million people — live in poverty. Some 25 million, or 23.6 percent, live in extreme poverty. In rural Mexico, more than 10 million people have a daily income of less than 12 pesos — a little more than one dollar. 'Migration is a necessity, not a choice,' explained Romualdo Gutierrez Cortez, a teacher in Santiago Juxtlaahuaca, in Oaxaca's rural Mixteca region. 'It is disheartening to see a student go through many hardships to get an education here in Mexico and become a professional, and then later in the United States do manual labor.'"

— David Bacon, "Living under the trees," December 2008 photo essay at <http://dbacon.igc.org>

From the rest of the world:

"Look, you can't sell consumer products to the Chinese because they make everything cheaper there already," [Thai entrepreneur Ami] Zarchi said. "Unless you have a fruit they cannot grow, a fish they cannot catch or medical equipment they cannot make — yet — then it's nearly impossible. I don't see how China can be our future. And yet, I don't know what else will be either. The Americans? The Europeans? Not for a while."

— Anthony Faiola, "A Global Retreat As Economies Dry Up," *Washington Post*, March 5, 2009.