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GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN

Latest data on working conditions in global supply chains, July 2019 edition

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The river of articles and reports on unsafe, unhealthy and illegal working conditions in the global supply chains of all major consumer products (apparel, electronics, toys, sports shoes, food, etc.) continues unabated. I have **assembled a selection** of the key reports and articles for the last few months.

Among my favorites in this recent collection:

- A new section on women and gender issues in the workplace;
- A special section on Bangladesh and the dramatic events of recent months that mean drastic changes to the Bangladesh Accord;

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- A series of reports on garment factories in Ethiopia – the new “promised land” of the garment industry – and how the clothing brands are recreating the unsafe, unhealthy and illegal conditions in Africa they have created in supply chain factories in other parts of the world, despite the many claims of their “corporate social responsibility” programs and
- A series of reports that document how the sourcing policies and practices of international brands with global supply chains drives the illegal and abusive conditions found in virtually all global supply chains.

There are increasing numbers of reports that (finally) recognize the wide-scale prevalence and huge impact of sexual harassment and assault against women workers in global supply chains ([here](#) and [here](#)). Also there are growing demands that the International Labor Organization establish an enforceable convention to set an international floor for national laws ([here](#)).

Over the last several months, there have been **dramatic developments** with the ground-breaking Bangladesh Accord for Fire and Building Safety. Following a relentless campaign by some factory owners to end this mandatory inspection and hazard correction program, the Bangladesh government set a February 2020 deadline for the Accord to be rolled into government regulatory enforcement agencies. I share the concern of global labor rights activists that these agencies are understaffed, under-resourced, and lack the political will to assume these responsibilities.

Between now and next February, the country’s garment factory owners association is being allowed to set up an office inside the formerly independent Accord. The factory owners association now will have veto power over the hazard correction orders issued to factories, and whether non-complying factories will be cut off from receiving more orders from the international brands in the Accord ([here](#) and [here](#)).

Illustrating how international brands roam the world looking for the most vulnerable workers and most compliant governments in search of the

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lowest production and compliance costs, Ethiopia has become the new “promised land” for international clothing brands. Garment workers in Ethiopia are paid as little as 12 cents an hour and there is near-zero enforcement of the few labor laws that exist ([here](#) and [here](#)). Terrible conditions have sparked efforts by workers there to protect themselves with a union ([here](#)).

Lastly, there is now documentation that the root cause of the miserable conditions in global supply chains are the direct result of the purchasing policies and practices of the international brands themselves ([here](#) and [here](#)). Local factory operators are squeezed by the brands and their middlemen with ever-lower per-unit prices paid by the brands, short delivery times and draconian penalties for late deliveries, and unfunded requirements for brand corporate social responsibility publicity campaigns ([here](#) and [here](#)).

I've [written previously](#) about how conscientious consumers and public health professional can monitor working conditions and workers' rights in global supply chains. The UK's “Business & Human Rights Resource Centre” provides a one-stop way, thanks to the staff of this non-profit organization. They scour the internet for the latest reports from companies, governments and non-governmental organizations on all aspects of global business. You [can sign up](#) for a weekly notification.

The [Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network](#) also continues to provide up-to-date information on CSR on its website.

Garrett Brown is a certified industrial hygienist who worked for Cal/OSHA for 20 years as a field Compliance Safety and Health Officer, and then served as Special Assistant to the Chief of the Division before retiring in 2014. Since retiring, Brown continues to follow Cal/OSHA issues and established the “[Inside Cal/OSHA](#)” website. Brown also has been the volunteer Coordinator of the Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network since 1993 and has coordinated projects in Bangladesh, Central America, China, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Mexico and Vietnam.