



SafeTalk



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Mexican Miner's Union Wants Company Negligence to be Punishable by Law



Mexican Mine Workers Union President Napoleón Gomez, seen here at last years national HS&E conference says there is an urgent need for a law against corporate homicide that can be used to punish companies that put their workers' lives in danger. Napoleón is continuing to lead the union from Vancouver BC.

Health and safety at work is once more under the spotlight in Mexico after the death of four miners last week.

The companies responsible are Mittal Steel and Peñoles. The National Miners' and Metalworkers' Union of Mexico led by Napoleón Gómez Urrutia, said that these regrettable deaths "justify the national union's request to the National Congress to punish company negligence." On March 10, Luis Alberto Santana García, a rigger, was killed. He was a member at Lázaro Cárdenas, Michoacán and employed by SADCON. He was climbing a ladder alone when the ladder slipped. He fell to the floor sustaining head injuries that led to his death. Two days later, two more workers, Edson Enriquez Martínez, 25 and Gustavo Navarro, a furnace operator, lost their lives. They were employed by CC Industrial, a subcontractor providing services to Mittal Steel. A supervisor ordered the injection of nitrogen into a pipe to check for possible leaks, but the pipe had not been fully drained, which led a cap on the pipe to fly off, causing the workers to fall a distance of 20 m.

Another miner, Reynaldo Monreal Guerrero, died on Saturday 14 March. He worked for Minera Sabinas, part of the Peñoles company. He was assistant driller and responsible for packing explosives into blast holes to help fragment the rock. The rock he was working on fell on his chest, causing serious injuries, leading to his death a few hours later. Another miner, Rogelio Carrillo Acuña, 21, died in the same way at the same workplace on Monday March 2nd.

The union said the companies have a duty to protect the lives of their workers and that it is urgent for them to establish health and safety systems to prevent more deaths happening. Napoleón Gómez Urrutia has called for a law to punish companies for this type of accident, which should not occur in the 21st century because the technology and prevention methods in this area are very advanced.

Coming Events

April 6-7 Western Conference on Safety, Vancouver BC
April 21 BC Fed Incident Investigation, Williams Lake BC
April 28 National Day of Mourning
May 3 - 9 2009 North American OS&H (NAOSH) Week
May 7-8 Man. Fed H&S Conference, Winnipeg Man.
May 11 Understanding & Preventing Human Error, Calgary AB.
May 14 Understanding & Preventing Human Error, Vancouver BC

Denmark Compensates Night Workers After Breast Cancer Link

Thirty-seven women in Denmark have won the right to compensation after claiming that their breast cancer was linked to their long-term night shift work, the National Board of Industrial Injuries said recently.

The state-run agency received 75 applications for compensation in 2008, of which "37 were considered to be founded, entitling the applicants to compensation," spokeswoman Birgitte Lynhe told AFP.

In the 37 cases, there were no other significant factors that might explain the development of breast cancer.

Night shift work is believed to cause disturbed sleep, fatigue and digestive problems, among other things.

Scientific studies have shown that sleep disruption can cause the body to produce less melatonin, which can help prevent cancer. Denmark decided in November 2007 to consider financial compensation for the women after Danish and international studies "showed possible links between night work over a period of 20 to 30 years and breast cancer," Lynhe said.

The Scandinavian country is now considering classifying breast cancer as an occupational illness.

Lynhe said the agency was waiting for a report from the International Agency for Research on Cancer on recent studies on the subject.

"If they confirm the correlation between breast cancer and night shift work, we will consider putting the effects of night work on the list of work-related illnesses," she said.

In 2001, a study by the Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research revealed that night shift work could increase the risk of breast cancer by up to 60 percent.

Steelworker Member Killed in Avalanche

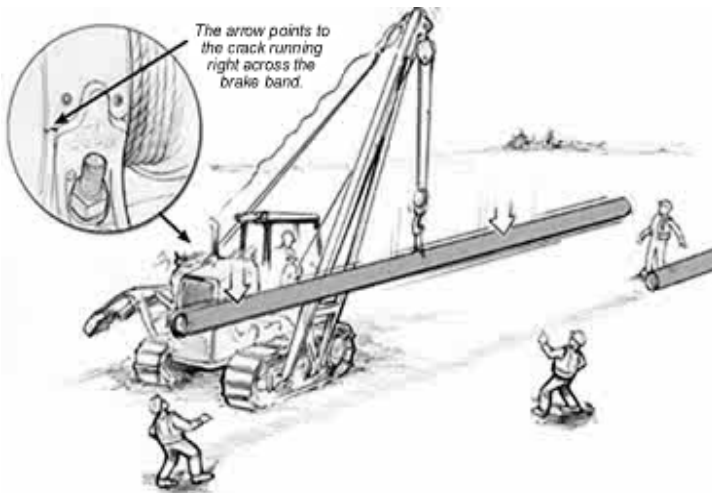
One of the two snowmobilers buried in an avalanche this week was a member of USW Local 1595 in Wabamun, Alberta. Kory Wagner was a mechanic at the Highvale mine. He leaves behind his pregnant wife, Lori, and a two-year-old daughter. The discovery of the men's bodies came after a search effort that was initially hampered by conditions on the mountain near McBride, BC.

Our sincere condolences go out to Kory's family and friends.

HAZARD ALERT

Load falls when braking system fails on side boom tractor

A recent close call highlights the danger of poorly maintained band brake systems on hoisting equipment. A side boom tractor used for pipe laying was lifting a 40-foot (12-metre) section of pipe 10 inches (25 centimetres) in diameter. Three workers were guiding the load into position when the steel band of the side boom winch's friction brake system failed. As a result, the boom dropped suddenly and the load fell to the ground. Fortunately, no one was injured. A second pipe layer at this worksite also posed a risk of failure and injury to workers. Its winch also had cracks in the brake bands.



Safe work practices:

- Conduct complete inspections of side boom tractors as often as required by their frequency of service. The inspection must follow the manufacturer's instructions and all other applicable design and safety standards.
- Determine if braking system defects such as the following affect safe operation:
 - deformed, cracked, or corroded members
 - loose bolts or rivets
 - worn, cracked, or distorted parts such as pins, linkages, shafts, and locking and clamping devices
 - excessive wear on brake system parts, linings, pawls, and ratchets
- Remove from service any side boom tractor with a defect that affects safe operation. Repair the equipment before returning it to service.
- Maintain side boom tractors as specified by the manufacturer or a professional engineer. Any maintenance and repair must be done by — or under the direct supervision of — a qualified person.
- Keep maintenance records of any defects found during inspection or operation. Report any unsafe conditions or concerns right away to a supervisor.

Research Centre to Study Workplace Carcinogens; Doctor Calls it a Major Step in 'Initiating Preventive Actions'

Source: Toronto Star

A new research centre dedicated to identifying and eliminating exposure to cancer-causing substances in the workplace opened in Toronto yesterday.

More than 25 chemicals used in workplaces are known to cause cancer, there is strong evidence another 100 are carcinogenic, and there is suspicion about hundreds of other substances.

"This (centre) is a major step in identifying carcinogens at workplaces and initiating preventive actions," said Dr. Aaron Blair, interim director of the new Occupational Cancer Research Centre.

The centre, with five staff members and a budget of \$1 million, is a joint venture between Cancer Care Ontario, the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board, the Canadian Cancer Society and the United Steelworkers. It will operate out of Cancer Care Ontario's University Ave. office.

There are no statistics for the number of Ontarians or Canadians stricken with cancer at workplaces, but recent studies in the U.S., Britain and Finland indicate 2 to 8 per cent of cancer-related deaths may be linked carcinogen exposure at work.

Commonly known occupational cancers are lung, bladder and skin cancer, leukemia and mesothelioma, which is almost always caused by asbestos.

Substances such as radon, benzene, coal tar and asbestos have been identified as carcinogens and hundreds others are suspected, but not much is known about them.

"We already know a lot of carcinogens," said Loraine Marrett, a senior scientist with Cancer Care Ontario. "We want to take a broader approach."

Organizers also want to get more people involved. "We can't do everything; we have to start building a body of (people) who will be interested," said Marrett.

Blue-collar workers are more likely to develop workplace-related cancers because they generally have more carcinogen exposures at work, said Marrett.

That exposure is mostly preventable, but "some workplace substances suspected of causing cancer have never been evaluated," said Blair, an expert in occupational and environmental epidemiology.

"We don't know what workers are exposed and to what concentrations. Or what kind of carcinogens are found in which kind of workplaces," Blair said.

"There are too many questions and few answers."

New Health & Safety Network Launched

In response to BC coastal forest workers requests the USW has launched a new Internet-based network that has been established to assist with the urgent and ongoing safety and health issues in the BC forest industry.

The network's website - FWSN.org - will be the main vehicle for communications to reach out to all forest workers.

The site will be a worker focused site for exchanging health and safety information and seeking solutions from the forest workers. A pilot project initiative will focus on safety issues affecting Coastal loggers and other woodlands employees.