

Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network **Red de apoyo sobre salud ocupacional en las maquiladoras**

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Grupo Mexico – Not the Miners Union – Ran the Cananea Mine and Copper Ore Processing Plants Into the Ground

In October 2007 a binational team of occupational health professionals conducted health surveys with copper miners and a walk-around of the struck open-pit mine and processing plants. Based on worker interviews and a survey of the facilities, it was clear that the company had systematically cut back maintenance and actually disassembled ventilation systems designed to protect plant workers for years before the union miners struck in July 2007.

“It’s true that conditions in the Cananea mine and processing plants are in a terrible state of disrepair and are a danger to the health and safety of workers, but the party responsible for this deplorable state of affairs is the management of Grupo Mexico which has systemically undermined maintenance at the plant,” according to Garrett Brown, Coordinator of the Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network and the coordinator of the eight-member US-Mexican team of health professionals.

“The Grupo Mexico managers of the Cananea mine went so far as to physically dismantle ventilation systems inside the ore processing plants which caused miners to be exposed to dense clouds of rock dust for more than two years before the strike. This dust contains silica – which can cause cancer and fatal lung diseases – at concentrations at least 10 times higher than the Mexican health and safety regulations,” Brown said.

In addition to silica exposures, miners and plant workers faced serious safety hazards in 10-ton and 15-ton cranes without brakes; unguarded machine parts, exposed 480-volt electrical circuit boxes and wiring.

“All of these problems existed at the time the strike began on July 30, 2007, and Grupo Mexico managers did nothing to correct these serious hazards either before the July 2007 strike or after the company resumed control of the facility for several months in the spring of 2008,” Brown noted.

This negligence on the part of Grupo Mexico management is confirmed by two separate inspections of the Mexican government's own workplace safety inspectors, as well as the MHSSN survey team.

In April 2007, workplace health and safety inspectors from the Mexican Secretaria del Trabajo y Provision Social (STPS) conducted a two-day inspection of the Cananea facility. At the end of the site visit, the inspectors issued a report ordering Grupo Mexico to implement 72 separate corrective actions.

Among the 72 correction actions ordered were: 1) installation and use of dust collectors in the Concentrator areas; 2) repair of the malfunctioning brakes on a 10-ton and a 15-ton crane in Area 30 of the Concentrator; 3) installation of guards on moving parts and energized equipment; 4) correction of electrical hazards; 5) repair or replacement of damaged or missing wall and roof panels; and 6) a major housekeeping effort to clean-up accumulated dusts throughout the plant.

In October 2007, the MHSSN team, including two Mexican, one Colombian and five US and Mexican-American physicians (3), pulmonary technician, nurse and industrial hygienists (3), confirmed the April 2007 STPS report. A copy of the January 2008 final report of the MHSSN team is posted at:

<http://mhssn.igc.org/CananeaOHSReport.pdf>

In March 2008, in response to the MHSSN report, STPS conducted an "extraordinary inspection" of the Cananea mine and plants. The STPS report called on Grupo Mexico management to make **265** corrections of health and safety hazards on site. The STPS report included no reference whatever to "vandalism" or "destruction" caused by miners at the facility.

The April 2007 and March 2008 STPS reports, in addition to the October 2007 MHSSN report, are a stunning indictment of mismanagement and deliberate destruction on the part of Grupo Mexico managers of equipment and facilities in Cananea.

"The Cananea facility has been deliberately run into the ground, not by the miners, but by Grupo Mexico's management which has been waging war on the miners and their union for more than three years. The health and safety of miners in Cananea has been in jeopardy for all this time and it is time for Grupo Mexico to end their war and begin to meet their responsibilities under Mexican law," Brown declared.

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