



Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s CFO

**For the labor rights and all human
rights of the maquiladora workers**



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NETWORK MAKES A SPLASH AT THE WORLD SAFETY CONGRESS

Maquiladora Health & Safety Support Network Newsletter

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The Network hosted a "Grassroots Social Hour" at the September World Safety Congress in Orlando, Florida, which drew more than 100 participants from all corners of the globe. The activity was designed to present the work of two Network partners - COVERCO in Guatemala and CFO in Mexico - so that occupational health professionals attending the conference could consider possible collaborations with grassroots organizations of workers in the developing world.

Speaking at the gathering were Julia Quinonez of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreros on the US-Mexico border and Homero Fuentes of COVERCO in Guatemala, who has also been coordinator of a region-wide initiative in Central America. Quinonez and Fuentes described their organizations' work in the area of workplace safety as well as other labor rights, and appealed for international solidarity and support. A representative from the Guangzhou Occupational Health & Rehabilitation Center in southern China was also scheduled to speak, but he could not make the trip to the U.S. because of a medical emergency.

Quinonez and Fuentes described working conditions in factories in their countries, many owned by or operated for U.S.-based Fortune 500 companies. Despite claims by transnational corporations of implementing "one global standard" for workplace health and safety, actual factory conditions in Mexico and Guatemala, as well as other "export processing zones" around the world, are often in violation of national laws, international conventions, and corporate "codes of conduct."

The speakers described their organizations' efforts to increase the factory workers' understanding of workplace hazards, possible control measures, and their rights under the law. Both organizations have organized workshops with our Network and have carried out follow-up activities to distribute written materials and technical assistance to workers in their countries. They solicited additional support from the assembled occupational health professionals for ongoing projects concerning workplace safety.

The social hour was co-hosted by the National Safety Council, the U.S. coordinating organization for the World Congress. Alan McMillan, President and CEO of the NSC, attended the social hour and opened the program with his greetings. Congress participants who attended the social gathering came from two dozen countries in the Americas, Asia, Africa and Europe.

In addition to the social gathering, Quinonez, Fuentes and Network Coordinator Garrett Brown spoke on a panel on "Occupational Safety and Health Conditions of Vulnerable Populations in the Americas" during the three-day international conference. The Network's two trainings in Central America involving field day visits to Korean-owned factories producing garments for The Gap were the subject of another conference presentation by a representative of the clothing manufacturer's corporate social responsibility department.

The XVth World Congress on Safety and Health at Work was held for the first time in the United States in Orlando on September 18-22, 2005. The every-three year gathering was co-sponsored by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the International Social Security Association (ISSA) and U.S. organizations including the U.S. Department of Labor (OSHA and MSHA) and the National Safety Council (NSC), which was the national host organization. The Congress had four main themes: Impact of globalization: opportunities and risks; Leadership in safety and health; Challenges in a changing world of work; and Prevention.

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