The Workers and Emerson Electric

Unsafe working conditions cause severe injuries in Motores Reynosa workers

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A number of work-related accidents took place during the last year in one of the Emerson Electric-owned plants in the city of Reynosa, Mexico, according to many workers who witnessed the accidents. Some of these accidents caused severe injuries to young workers and were due to very unsafe working conditions in the plant.

In one case in Feb. 2006, a supervisor forced a young worker to lift a very heavy machine and move it from one point to another. The worker stumbled upon a crack on the floor and the machine fell on his right thigh causing on him a 15-centimeter long cut that required 28 stitches.

All maquiladoras are required by law to report all work-related accidents and take the injured workers to a hospital or clinic of the "Seguro Social", a federal public system that provides universal health coverage to workers affiliated with it. The doctors there provide medical attention and can grant leave permits to the ill or injured workers. The employer in turn has to abide to the doctor's assessment and give the required sick leaves to the worker while continue paying her/his salary. In the case of that accident at Emerson in Feb. 2006, managers ordered to take the injured worker to the private hospital Santander. The company continued paying his wages as if nothing has happened. For a whole month the worker had a sort of informal sick leave time, but soon the company put pressure for him to return to work.

But the worker reported his accident to the Seguro Social when back in the factory he discovered he had an infection in the injured leg. A human resources manager told him that the infection was the worker's own fault. "Who knows what did you eat, it was you mistake" he told the worker.

In the Seguro Social clinic the workers was told the infection was caused by machine oil that wasn't removed from his leg when he was operated. The doctors then had to open his cut six centimeters to remove the infection.

Emerson had no choice but to report that accident as work related, even though it did so arguing the worker was with a co-worker, without mentioning the role of the supervisor in causing the accident.

A work area in Motores Reynosa has a big carousel with a conveyor that carries up and down the motors that go to a furnace. In the operation a lid is glued with Epoxi to the motors. As management pushes the workers for more production quotas, they are asked to put more motors than the carousel can sustain. That has caused the motors to come back down instead of going up. The motors end up near the feet of the workers. An emergency button is supposed to be close for cases of emergency, but to reach it the workers have to risk being hit by a motor.

In another incident, a worker lost his hand's little finger when a machine smashed it. Emerson operates with some old machinery that is adapted with guards and sensors. Those so-called "grafts" don't work well and provoke accidents instead. Despite the company being responsible for such anomalies, Emerson has been quick to blame the worker when an accident happens. In the case of this worker who lost his finger, the machine couldn't be retracted by the victim or by his coworkers nearby. An engineer has to be called and several minutes later he retrieved the workers' hand.

Emerson workers have been witness of more accidents that management tries to hide, violating the law and putting in great risk the health and lives of its workers.

"The law of the plant"

The workers also complain of shift changes decided on the top without any consultation with the affected people. Those changes, which include the creation of new shifts has impacted the workers. The rationale behind more work shifts is to get rid of overtime costs.

Other Emerson violations of the Mexican Federal Labor Law and even of its own "protection contract" include not granting the holidays that legally are "mandatory rest days." For example, on May 1st 2006, International Labor Day the workers were compelled to work. The have been told that is "the law of the plant."

Emerson has brought Mexican workers to its plants in the U.S. to repair motors, but some of those workers found at the end they were not paid more money, but less.

Due to those unsafe working condition and abusive practices, turnover in Motores Reynosa is considered big.

The Reynosa workers of Emerson hear the company's motto is: "Let's do more with less."

The "protection contract" of Emerson

Emerson has a "protection contract" for its Reynosa plans. The "Motores Reynosa Collective Bargaining Agreement" was signed by the company and a false trade union which in reality is only one man who sold the contract to the company. That's why those type of contracts are widely known in Mexico as deals that "protect" de employers, never its members it supposed to represent. Those fake "unions" that sign the protection contracts are known as "phantom" or "white" unions. That is the reason the workers under protection contracts usually say that the "union representatives" were appointed by the maquiladora itself.