



28 April Alert: *Fears of Cancer by Chinese Companies*

Cadmium Cancer Fears in China Lead to Urgent Call for Information & Action

Paris: Wednesday 21 March, 2007

For PDF copy of this story: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpQ_9h.EN.pdf

ITUC/GM: The International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) has launched an global campaign with the NGO “Globalization Monitor –GM” targeting the operation of three Chinese subsidiaries of *Gold Peak Batteries International Limited* in connection with the poisoning of workers by cadmium, a well-known carcinogen. This campaign, the first of its kind, is organized in the context of the 28 April International Commemoration Day (ICD)*.

The company at the centre of attention is 53.4% owned by *Gold Peak (Holdings) of Hong Kong*. For more detailed information, see the 28 April company profile about the Gold Peak group of companies at: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpQ_9d.EN.pdf .



Gold Peak Industries produces and markets batteries, electronic components, cables, acoustical and light-fitting materials. In addition to its operations in China and Hong Kong, the company has a manufacturing network that extends into Singapore and Malaysia. Its marketing network reaches Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Philippines, Poland, South Korea, Sweden, Thailand, The Netherlands, Taiwan and U.K.

Cadmium-related problems with this group of companies have received wide publicity. A number of fatalities have already been reported, as have sixteen cases of confirmed cadmium poisoning, and 400 more reported cases of excessive exposure. An additional 1,000 workers, most of them young females, continue to face short or long term exposure through their work. .

ITUC & GM invite recommendations from the international community about possible courses of action to remedy the situation. Both organizations have issued a call for information relating to the operations of Gold Peak and its three Chinese subsidiaries - *Huizhou Power Pack Company Limited* (惠州超霸電池有限公司), *Huizhou Advance Battery Technology Company* (惠州先進電池有限公司) and *Shenzhen Jetpower Batteries Limited* (深圳捷霸電池有限公司 公). At the same time, they have requested additional information on their release of such carcinogenic agents as cadmium, as well as an analysis of their likely impacts.

Charges of Deficient Monitoring and Risk Analysis

The true extent of the hazard posed by exposures at Gold Peak is clouded by inadequate and suspicious testing methods for cadmium poisoning by local authorities and company officials. The case has already produced disturbing evidence concerning cancer rates amongst Chinese workers in Guangdong province. One of the factories in questions has already been fined by local authorities; however, the compensation packages it has been ordered to disburse have been meagre.

A very small percentage of workers diagnosed with problems have received compensation, thus far. Allegations of company wrongdoing have been exacerbated, furthermore, by a number of unresolved strikes, with multiple reports of the companies' failure to reinstate workers, or to provide adequate health care or compensation for lost days of work or sickness.

While public pressure has yielded improvements in some factories, concerns exist that Gold Peak has been subcontracting the manufacture of cadmium-nickel batteries to other operations in Hunan province, where occupational health and safety standards are lower.

The Hong Kong-based Confederation of Trade Unions (HKCTU) and Globalization Monitor (GM) were amongst the first to begin a campaign in defense of the workers that began in 2004, leading to a defamation suit against them by Gold Peak. The ITUC joined its affiliate and GM in their campaign in 2006, bringing further international pressure to bear on the company.

The risky and courageous activities of HKCTU & GM is beginning to produce public calls for proper compensation and treatment of victims. In early March 2007, the Dutch ITUC affiliate "Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging" (FNV) hosted a conference in Amsterdam, "Made in China" which raised awareness and spread concern about this issue world-wide.

World-wide action must now be taken by trade unions, civil society, governments and intergovernmental bodies to call for corporate accountability by Gold Peak Industries, and to address the global threat of cadmium.

For more information contact
Lucien Royer
International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC)
Trade Union Advisory Committee to the OECD (TUAC)
15, Rue La Pérouse - 75016 Paris, France
Tel (331) 5537 3737 Fax 4754 9828
royer@tuac.org

Additional information about cadmium risks:

Human lungs, kidneys and bone tissue are particularly vulnerable to long term exposures to cadmium, which is a known carcinogen for humans. The dangers of cadmium are well known, with reports of the now famous 'itai-itai' disease in Japan dating back to the early 1940's. A simple "cadmium" web search, when connected to the ILO, OECD, WHO or UNEP, will yield a wealth of authoritative information sources, attesting to the high level of concern in the medical and scientific community about the occupational, public health and environmental effects of cadmium in many of its chemical configurations. Much of the information points directly to the need for cadmium to be banned or its use severely restricted.

Most of literature on hazards posed by cadmium reveals a strong association between the known physical effects of cadmium with those exhibited or reported for the current Chinese victims. The substance is currently under review by the UN 'Strategic Approach to International Chemicals Management (SAICM)' which could lead to possible restrictions by such UN bodies as the ILO, UNEP and the WHO. International civil society and trade union bodies, including the ITUC, have already called for a phasing out and replacement of cadmium products.

Background Information about the Gold Peak case:

- ☞ [1] PDF Copy of this Wednesday 21 March, 2007 story also containing information about cadmium dangers and monitoring by companies: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpQ_9h.EN.pdf].
- ☞ [2] Copy of this 28 April company profile of Gold Peak Industries: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpQ_9d.EN.pdf]
- ☞ [3] Globalisation Monitor (GM): [gm_hongkong@hotmail.com], PO box 72729, Kowloon Central Post Office, Hong Kong, Tel (852) 6185 1684).
- ☞ [4] GM' "Report on the Gold Peak Cadmium Poisoning Case", March 2007: [http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpQ_9f.EN.pdf].

- ☞ [5] SOMO – The Netherlands: Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations: <http://www.vbdo.nl/index.php> or contact Francis Weyzig [f.weyzig [at] somo.nl].
- ☞ [6] SOMO's Gold Peak's corporate ownership structure: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpQ_9e.EN.pdf.
- ☞ [7] SOMO's background of GP functioning and operations in China and related activities in Hong Kong, Taiwan, The Netherlands and other countries: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpQ_9g.EN.pdf.
- ☞ [8] Some Corporate Buyers of GP batteries: Canon, Casia, Fuji, JVC, Kodac, Konica Minolta, Nikon, Olympus, Panasonic, Pentax, Ricoh, Soney and Toshiba <http://www.microbattery.com/tech-gp-digicam.htm>.

Other Sources of Information about the Gold Peak case:

- ☞ IHLO Hong Kong Office and campaign Page: http://www.ihlo.org/C/GP%20Workers/GPWorkers_index.html
- ☞ International Metalworkers Federations: <http://www.imfmetal.org/main/china/index.cfm?n=544&l=2&c=14248>
- ☞ International Federation of Chemical, Energy, Mine & General Workers Unions <http://www.icem.org/en/7-Asia-Pacific/2032-Gold-Peak-Battery-Workers-Have-Their-Day-in-Court-in-China>

Information about 28 April ICD

* The 28 April International Commemoration Day (ICD) For Dead and Injured Workers is recognized by workers, trade unions and many governments as a day to highlight the plight that workers face due to unsustainable work and workplaces. A main theme for 2007 calls on everyone to address the causes of occupational cancers at the workplace.

- ☞ [1] **The above story is included in the 28 April 'Update' for all themes:**
http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_5Ad.EN.pdf
- ☞ [2] **What is 28 April about? See this 2007 backgrounder:**
English: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_5Ag.EN.pdf
Français: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_5Ag.FR.pdf
Español: http://www.global-unions.org/pdf/ohsewpH_5Ag.SP.pdf