

# Garrett Brown: A Champion for Workers' Health

By Kelly Mills



**Garrett Brown, M.P.H. '91**, has devoted his professional life and volunteer time to protecting the health of workers, both locally and around the globe. Brown is a compliance officer in the Oakland District Office of the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA). In his 14 years with Cal/OSHA, Brown has conducted more than 500 inspections in Alameda County and as part of statewide teams inspecting California's Central Valley agricultural fields and garment sweatshops in Los Angeles and Orange County. Brown responds to worker complaints about unsafe conditions in their workplaces, investigates accidents (including worker fatalities), and conducts programmed inspections of high hazard industries, such as agriculture in the Central Valley and garment sweatshops in Los Angeles and Orange counties.

Since 1993, Brown has also served on volunteer basis as coordinator of the Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network (MHSSN), which includes more than 400 occupational health and safety professionals in Canada, Mexico, and the United States. The network provides information, technical assistance, and Spanish-language trainings, all pro bono, to Mexican workers in *maquiladoras* (factories) on the U.S. border, and conducts ongoing projects in Central America and Asia.


The network has organized many trainings in factories that produce goods for major brands. In Indonesia, two trainings were conducted in 2000 and 2002 with a dozen labor, women's, human rights and community-based non-governmental organizations and six trade unions. One training included a full day site visit to a 8,000-worker Korean contractor plant producing for Nike. In China, the 2001 project involved a rare partnership between international brands (Adidas, Nike, and Reebok), their Taiwanese contract manufacturers, migrant workers from western China, and four Hong Kong-based labor rights NGOs. The training took place inside a 30,000-worker Taiwanese operated factory making goods for Adidas.

In Central America, two trainings with independent monitoring groups, trade unions, women's and human rights organizations have been conducted in Guatemala in 2003 and 2004. As part of the trainings, day-long field exercises were conducted in two Korean operated garment plants producing for Gap Inc. and other U.S. retailers.

As Brown says, "Economic globalization means that environmental and occupational health are more important than ever before. Workplace hazards are now truly spread throughout every country in the world—'developed' and 'developing' alike—and the impact of industrial production now reaches into virtually every village and every ecosystem around the globe. Public health training and a genuine public health approach to growing workplace, community, and environmental health problems is essential for our collective survival on the planet."

In October 2003, Brown was a guest co-editor of a special issue of the *International Journal of Occupational and Environmental Health (IJOEH)* on the vital issue of occupational safety and health in China. He also authored an article on the impact of "lean manufacturing" production techniques on workplace safety in China, which will be published in the *IJOEH* in late 2007.

In December 2004, Brown authored two major reports issued by the MHSSN on ways the NAFTA trade agreement has failed to protect Mexican workers' health, and what measures are needed in international trade and investment treaties to effectively protect workplace safety and health in the global economy.

Brown has published articles on global occupational health and safety issues in the a number of publications, including *IJOEH*, *New Solutions*, *Multinational Monitor*, *Occupational Hazards*, *Social Justice*, *The Synergist*, and *Industrial Safety and Hygiene News*. 



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