

# **Are you using GP batteries?**

**How the GP group poisoned Mainland workers with Cadmium and how they are fighting back**

**Globalization Monitor**

January 2006

In July 2004, it was reported that one battery-producing factory (later increased to three) in Mainland China --- subsidiary of the Gold Peak Industrial group in Hong Kong --- had poisoned hundreds of workers with cadmium. Cadmium is a toxic chemical and once it has entered the body, it can take decades to flush out. High concentrations of cadmium in the body can cause kidney failure and acute physical pain in the bones and joints. The workers were poisoned after management made workers process cadmium with barely any protection. They were not even informed that cadmium is toxic as required by the Chinese occupational safety laws and regulations. In addition, one environmental group found that there were higher than normal levels of cadmium in the local environment.

In December 2003, several workers went to hospital for a check-up after suffering from extended periods of nausea. They were found to have abnormally high levels of cadmium. More workers became worried and collectively demanded that management arrange check-ups. Their demands were turned down. As a result, workers organised at least three strikes in pursuit of their demands June 2004. Management consequently agreed to the check-ups and ten workers were officially diagnosed as suffering from cadmium poisoning. At least 400 workers were found with abnormally high cadmium levels and were put on an observation list as required by the law. Most of them are women.

The workers have since stated that they have not received proper treatment and have been awarded inadequate compensation. Their efforts to petition the central government in Beijing for support have been met with threats of criminal charges by both local management and government officials.

The three factories – two located in Huizhou and one in Shenzhen, all in Guangdong province – are owned by the Hong Kong and Singapore based Asian TNC, Gold Peak Industrial Holding Ltd (GP). GP's electronic products are sold all over the world

under different brand names. GP CEO Victor Lo Chung Wing, has substantial investments on the Mainland and has developed close ties with well-placed government officials there. He is the largest individual shareholder of TCL, the major electronics company founded by the City Government of Huizhou. Lo was recently appointed to the Executive Council of Hong Kong government by the Chief Executive, Donald Tseng.

In December 2004, the first group of GP workers sued the company but their bid for a just settlement failed. In 24 June 2005, the Huizhou court found in favor of GP.

Meanwhile, the victims continue to suffer from severe aches and pains, headaches and hair loss. The ten workers who were officially certified as having cadmium poisoning – as opposed to high levels of cadmium – are in a much more serious medical condition.

Globalization Monitor, a Hong Kong based NGO, has taken up the case and has been campaigning against the GP to demand justice. We have staged many protests, bought GP shares in order to attend its Annual General Meeting and appealed for international support. The campaign has gained support from many trade unions and NGOs, including Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (CTU), the Neighbourhood and Workers' Service Centre (NWSC), Asia Monitor Resource Centre (AMRC), Students and Scholars Against Corporate Misbehavior (SACOM), and the Justice and Peace Commission of the HK Catholic Diocese etc.

In August 2005, GP announced the founding of a fund to provide financial assistance to workers. Yet, according to GP's own statements, only four percent of the 400 workers affected have so far received some money. There are many signs which make us suspect the sincerity of the company. To date, the company has failed to inform workers how to apply for 'financial assistance'.

Worse, recently it was discovered that 30 Hong Kong GP workers were also found with abnormally high cadmium in their bodies, with three of them being diagnosis as cadmium poisoning. With the list of victims continues to expand, it is clear that the fund would not be enough for workers.

In addition to this, Mainland GP workers were repeatedly harassed when they were arranged to have body check as required by the law. They were ordered to take off all their clothes, took shower and then took their urine sample under the inspection of

mysterious personnel who refused to show their name card. The workers interpret this as a way to discourage them from having annual medical check up.

Between 16<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2006, we facilitated six GP workers to visit HK. After meeting with the management with nothing positive, they launched a protest against the company, with the support of Hong Kong groups.

We will continue to work with GP workers to pressure the company until justice is brought to the victims.

International support is crucial in winning the case. You can help in many ways.

1 For more information you can visit GM website: <http://globalmon.org.hk>

2 Send protest letters to GP (please send a copy to us as well):

Mr. Victor Lo,  
Gold Peak Industries (Holdings) Limited  
Gold Peak Building, 8/F, 30 Kwai Wing Road, Kwai Chung,  
New Territories, Hong Kong.  
Tel: (852) 2427 1133 Fax: (852) 2489 1879  
E-mail: [gp@goldpeak.com](mailto:gp@goldpeak.com)

### **Solidarity with Chinese Workers!**

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Attachment: Photos of solidarity action

Protest on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2006



Protest on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2006



Occupation of the GP headquarter on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 2004

