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ILMC Supports Mexico City Workshop on Risk Assessment, Management and Communications in the Mining Industry

For centuries México has been one of the most important mining countries in the world and the contribution of this industrial sector to the economic and urban development of México has been significant, particularly during the period of rapid industrialization between 1950 and 1970.

In the 1980's and early 1990's, México was among the top three producers in the world of silver, celestite, bismuth, antimony, graphite, fluorite, barite, cadmium, arsenic and sulfur.



Dr. Cristina Cortinas de Nava, the Director General for Hazardous Wastes and Chemical Substances, National Institute of Ecology (INE) welcomes the delegates

Nevertheless, the environmental impacts of mining activities in México have never been systematically assessed, although there has been public concerns about occupational health, water and air pollution, for some time. These concerns have increased recently due in the light of the potential problems associated with childhood lead exposure, particularly those populations close to smelting operations.

There is, however, a recognition that the heterogeneous nature of minerals in different regions of México, the evolution of the various technologies employed to extract the minerals, the wide range of social conditions and diverse ecosystems, make it necessary to consider all these factors in assessing and managing the possible risks from mining and smelting waste materials.

At present in México there is strong public pressure to address pollution problems, to reduce the impact of hazardous waste generation attributed to the metallurgical industries, and to inform the public of any potential risks including the necessary actions required to negate them.

With these concerns in mind Dr. Cristina Cortinas de Nava, the Director General for Hazardous Wastes and Chemical Substances of the National Institute of Ecology (INE) for México organized a two day workshop in México City in November last year entitled "Risk Assessment, Management and Communications Related to Mining and Metallurgical Wastes". The workshop was sponsored by the INE, the National Environmental Research and Training Center, the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the International Lead Management Center (ILMC).

The delegates were welcomed to the workshop by Lic. Saburo Yamaguchi, the Head of the JICA mission in México. Cristina Cortinas then outlined the objectives which were to review the basic concepts, as well as national and international experiences, related to risk assessment, sound environmental management and communications, concerning mining and metallurgical environmental pollution and wastes. It was envisaged that the outcomes from the workshop would provide guidance to the Mexican regulators in formulating future environmental and health policies.

One of the first workshop speakers was Margarita Lozada representing the Mexican Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Secretaria de Comercio y Fomento Industrial (SECOFI). She emphasized the importance of the mining industry to the social fabric of the country and pointed out to the delegates that the mineral deposits in México are so scattered, that in many areas mining is the only industry and the sole source of income.

Margarita Lozada went on to point out that it has been estimated that only 20% of the mineral resources of México have been either discovered or exploited to date. The potential economic wealth is enormous, but unless México resolves the problems generated by the existing abandoned mine sites the environmental and human cost will rise with each passing year.

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Margarita Lozada representing the Mexican Ministry of Commerce and Industry (SECOFI)

The INE have worked closely over the years with the International Council for Metals in the Environment (ICME) and the Vice-President for Health and the Environment, Guy Ethier presented to the delegates an overview of "Risk Assessment". Guy explained that the ICME had developed a workplace guidance document that links occupational exposure data, medical surveillance and personal or job function data in a manner that can be usefully interpreted. Guy also clarified the outcome of the International Workshop on Environmental Risk Assessment of Metals that was held in Montpellier, France in October last year. Guy's contribution to the workshop was particularly relevant to the INE, as current Mexican law does not distinguish between the terms environmental "risk" and "hazard".



ICME Vice-President for Health and the Environment, Guy Ethier, discusses "Risk Assessment"

ILMC Program Manager, Brian Wilson, tackled the troublesome topic of "effective communications". He described the shift of the spotlight towards 'stakeholders' rather than 'shareholders' and explained how this had

lead to a change in business communications and public relations (PR). PR, which is defined to be the strategic management function, is now focused on building and maintaining an impeccable corporate reputation. Unfortunately, until relatively recently, in many countries environmental issues rated little more than an afterthought as business and governments looked for ways to compete in the global market and provide sufficient food and healthcare for their growing populations. Brian continued by emphasizing that enlightened governments are anxious that industry does not repeat the mistakes made by many of the most developed countries and are working towards sustainable economic growth and sound environmental management. At the same time both governments and industries are increasingly attentive to the image problems that can arise if environmental considerations are ignored.



ILMC's Graham Kenyon sharing his experience of the Trail Community Lead Program with the delegates

Graham Kenyon, formerly with Cominco and now working for the ILMC Lead Risk Reduction Project, followed up the communication theme by sharing his personal experience with the Trail Community Program. This lead risk reduction program is a model for any pro-active outreach community project.

Chiaki Izumikawa, formally the head of the Japanese company Dowo's operations in México gave a fascinating insight into the changing face of the mining industry and a glimpse of the likely future. Chiaki explained that the Dowo group had a vision of sustainability that was gradually being realized as natural resources were depleted and the company increasingly relied on "urban" mining; that is, recycling in order to maintain a material feedstock for the group's smelters.

Dan Vornberg, ILMC Vice Chairman and a Vice President of the Doe Run Company led the delegates through case studies at the Company's two operations in Missouri

A Role to Play....

PRI Achieves ISO 14001 Certification

by Rosa Diokno, EMR - PRI

Philippine Recyclers Inc. (PRI) has believed in its role in environmental protection and preservation. The company has actively participated in pollution prevention programs, recycling symposia, community environmental activities. It is the first company to have in place the first true used battery recycling "takeback" campaign in the Philippines. This is the "Balik Baterya" (Return Your Batteries) program that was launched in November 1995. PRI also actively participates in programs specifically designed to enhance its production capacity and environmental performance.



Jacob Tagorda, PRI President proudly accepts the ISO 14001 Certificate from the Soci t  Generale de Surveillance International Certification Services Country Manager Richard Taylor

In 1997, in order to ensure continual improvement of its environmental performance, PRI embarked on a program to achieve ISO 14001 certification. ISO 14001 is the internationally recognized standard for environmental management systems (EMS). To date there are about 50 companies in the Philippines certified to ISO 14001. Many of these businesses are from the semiconductor and electronics industries or are multinational companies. PRI is the largest lead smelter in the Philippines and the first heavy industrial company in the country to attain the required standard for ISO 14001.

Implementing an environmental management system based on the ISO 14001 framework at the PRI plant was not an easy task. Although the company already had a formal quality management system and had most of the components to meet the standard in place, much work was required especially in the planning stages to meet the required standard. The company commissioned several specialist teams to work on the project. A core group of five employees worked on the project on a full time basis and in total, almost half of the PRI employees were directly involved in the project. An estimated 36,000 man-hours were spent on group meetings and another 9,900 man-hours on training.

Achieving ISO 14001 certification in the Philippines was particularly difficult because, unlike most countries, the country is still awaiting a facility to be designated for the disposal of toxic and hazardous waste. For many companies, especially those in the heavy industries, this has posed a major problem. Many companies simply

stockpile their waste materials in anticipation that in the near future a suitable landfill site will be designated and approved. PRI, however, with what may prove to be a major achievement, developed a means to recycle and reuse its current stock of waste materials.

PRI's certification was achieved because of the evident commitment of all its employees to develop means of reducing the company's environmental impact. Aside from the environmental management programs in place to address current environmental concerns, PRI engineers have developed a process to segregate ebonite case material from plate separators. This process, when approved by the EMB, will enable PRI to reduce its present stockpile of hard rubber waste by 70%. The remaining waste, composed of paper, PVC and PE separators will be further classified and retreated. PRI plans to use or sell the ebonite as secondary fuel.



Irving Guerrero, PRI Vice-President (at the podium) introduces the PRI Management Team to the guests at the ISO 14001 presentation dinner

PRI also developed a means of solidifying and stabilizing its blast furnace slag using a cement mixture. The resulting slag mix is formed into paving stones and hollow blocks. The solidified mix is sturdy enough to be used as material for walls and other non-load bearing structures. As with the hard rubber segregation procedure, this process is awaiting approval from the regulatory agency.

The commitment of the employees to environmental protection is also evident in their choice of Quality Circle Projects. Each year, every circle is asked to identify and resolve a concern. In the past two years, the majority of projects were related to the environment. In 1999, all 35 projects were concerned with environmental matters. The employee's awareness and level of understanding of the company's environmental impact and remediation programs was a key success element cited by the ISO auditors during the accreditation process.

PRI plays a leading role in the in the country's environmental "clean up" efforts through the "Balik Baterya" collection program. This program was initially launched as a means of recovering 36,000 tonnes of used domestic batteries (ULAB) each year. The scheme provides incentives to encourage the motoring public to

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return their spent battery when a new one is purchased. Utilizing the sales and retail network of the Oriental and Motolite Corporation, the "Balik Baterya" generated an average return of 750 tonnes of ULAB per month in its first year of implementation. This collection rate was about 100% above the previous years recovery of ULAB. Since then the collection rate has increased steadily by approximately 500 tonnes every year. Recently the "Balik Baterya" program has linked up with the Philippines' leading environmental pressure group, the ABS-CBN Foundation's "Bantay Kalikasan" and the company are optimistic that this collaboration will raise Filipino's awareness of sound recycling and the ensuing benefits.



Finance Secretary, Jose T. Pardo, congratulated the company on their achievement noting in particular PRI's leading position in the ASEAN community

Philippine Recyclers Inc. was awarded the ISO 14001 certificate on February 29 this year at a celebration dinner held at the Westin Philippine Plaza Hotel in Manila. Joining the company's management and supervisory staff, were Finance Secretary Jose T Pardo, Senator Sergio Osmena III and representatives from the Departments of Trade and Industry, Finance and the Environment. Also attending the presentation ceremony were representatives from international bodies including the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and ILMC. Speaking at the dinner Jose T. Pardo, congratulated the company on their achievement noting in particular PRI's leading position in the ASEAN community (Association of South East Asian Nations).

Presenting the award on behalf of the Société Generale de Surveillance, Richard Taylor, the International Certification Services Country Manager, expressed his congratulations and praised the PRI staff, whom, he said, without exception, were so committed to improving the company's environmental performance that it made every visit to the plant a rewarding experience.

Speaking on behalf of the UNCTAD Secretary General Rubens Ricupero, Ulrich Hoffmann, UNCTAD Economic Affairs Officer, also congratulated PRI for their fine achievement and said that the company's pro-active business strategy had turned PRI into a showcase of sound environmental performance. He went on to commit UNCTAD to continue to support the Philippine Government's initiative to develop coherent policies for sustainable development.

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Chiaki Izumikawa, from the Dowa Company, Japan

namely, Herculaneum and Glover. Dan explained how the company had tackled problems with emissions, waste residues and community relations.



Roberto Hernandez (center), ILMC Project Manager in Mexico, discusses possible options with Brian Wilson.

The afternoon of the final day was devoted to developing possible approaches, strategies, communication policies and regulatory instruments, related to the issues raised during the workshop. Closing the workshop, Cristina Cortinas thanked the delegates for their participation and informed them that the feedback from the group discussions had been most helpful and would be considered carefully by the INE as the Government prepared its future position on the control of mining and metallurgical wastes.

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