

# **Mexico mine reportedly has dust `2 to 3 feet high'**

**A new report claimed that Mexico's largest copper mine was fraught with health and safety hazards, and in need of a 'massive cleanup operation' before striking miners could return.**

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MEXICO CITY --

Employees at Mexico's largest copper mine are exposed to dangerous levels of mineral dust and acid mist, according to a report released Monday by the union whose strike has idled the mine since July.

Representatives of Mexico's National Mining and Metal Workers Union say they are prepared to strike until Grupo Mexico SAB agrees to conduct a "massive cleanup operation" and implement safety and training programs.

The union will send the report to President Felipe Calderón.

## **WORKERS ON STRIKE**

About 1,300 workers went on strike July 30 to protest health and safety conditions at the open-pit Cananea copper mine 30 miles south of the Arizona border in the northwestern Mexican state of Sonora.

A telephone call left with Grupo Mexico seeking comment Monday was not immediately returned. In the past, the company has said it is willing to negotiate health and safety issues to end the strike.

A U.S. pulmonary specialist, two Mexican doctors and three industrial hygienists compiled the report after visiting the mine and interviewing and examining the lungs of 68 workers, the study's coordinator, Garrett Brown, told The Associated Press by telephone on Friday.

Brown is an industrial hygienist and founder of the nonprofit Maquiladora Health and Safety Support Network in Berkeley, Calif.

The U.S.-based United Steelworkers union, which represents workers of a Grupo Mexico-owned U.S. copper mine, paid for the group's travel to Mexico, Brown said.

## **SAFETY HAZARDS**

The report found that a failure to maintain equipment and correct visible safety hazards meant "workers have been exposed to high levels of toxic dusts and acid mists" and that they ``work in simply dangerous surroundings."

"In 16 years of inspecting mines in the U.S., Mexico, Guatemala, Indonesia and China, I have never seen a place -- operated by a transnational corporation with so many resources -- that has such bad conditions," Brown said.

The report alleges the company dismantled dust collectors in the mine's processing plants two years ago, leaving workers exposed to 10 times more breathable quartz silica than what Mexican law allows. The study also alleges workers were exposed to hazardous levels of sulfuric acid mist in plants where lead sheets are plated with copper ore.

The mist "is so concentrated it's eating away the steel structure of the buildings," Brown said. ``You literally have piles of dust two to three feet high all over the processing plants."

Dr. Robert Cohen, a pulmonary specialist at Cook County Hospital in Chicago, Ill., told the news conference the medical team found a high prevalence of early signs of respiratory disease among the 68 workers.