



For Immediate Release

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Attn: News, Business, Tech Editors

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Samsung Whistleblower Reveals Toxic Chemical Use and Violations at Samsung Vietnam

(Göteborg, Sweden): A former manager of Environmental Health and Safety at Samsung Vietnam has stepped forward as a whistleblower to reveal widespread use of toxic chemicals and environmental violations. South Korean investigative news media, [Newstapa](#), has released five short video reports with English subtitles.¹ Because Samsung is notoriously secretive, the Newstapa reports offer a rare glimpse into how the company's mobile phone factories actually operate. The Newstapa reports underscore the need for better protections for Vietnam's large and growing electronics work force, and the need for transparency around chemicals used throughout electronics production.

Key Findings about Samsung Vietnam in the Newstapa reports:

- A forty-year veteran in charge of Environmental Health and Safety lost his pride in the company when recommendations to address safety measures were ignored by Samsung management due to costs.
- Samsung outsourced work environment risks to Vietnam and used a double standard by conducting operations in Vietnam in a way that would not be permitted in South Korea.
- Within Vietnam, Samsung outsourced toxic chemical-intensive processes to subcontractors who were revealed to be using a variety of toxic chemicals including methanol. Recently, 37 workers were [poisoned](#) by methanol at a Samsung supplier in Vietnam. One worker died and three teenage workers lost their eyesight.
- Serious fires at Samsung suppliers occurred because basic safety measures were ignored. In 2017, 78% of Samsung's suppliers in Vietnam violated fire safety requirements.
- Samsung left design defects in pollution control devices unaddressed and knowingly released chemicals to air and water.
- 48% of the chemical products used have at least one ingredient that is carcinogenic, mutagenic, or toxic to reproduction. This is the first time information about toxic chemicals used in Samsung's Vietnam factories has been disclosed publicly.
- Toxic chemicals were used openly without proper containment and fume hoods, ventilation systems and pollution controls were inadequate or absent.
- There was inadequate or a complete lack of personal protection equipment.
- An investigation by Vietnamese regulators in 2017 concluded that there were no problems at Samsung's factories but this contradicted the company's own investigation revealed in internal documents.
- Newstapa received an email from a worker at Samsung Electronics, reporting that the company has systematically covered up risks, injuries, and accidents at its global factories in order to achieve Key Performance Indicators.

In 2017, the [Research Center for Gender, Family and Environment in Development](#) (CGFED) and [IPEN](#) released an unprecedented [study](#) on the experiences of women working at two Samsung factories in Vietnam, which documented health and workplace violations by the electronics industry giant. Workers reported experiences of

¹ 1: [Global Samsung's Dangerous Factory #1: A Safety Manager's Confession](#)
2: [Global Samsung's Dangerous Factory #2: The Secret of 7 Years of Stench](#)
3: [Global Samsung's Dangerous Factory #3: Evolving Risk](#)
4: [Global Samsung's Dangerous Factory #4: Risk Transferred](#)
5: [Global Samsung's Dangerous Factory #5: A Hole in 'Samsung Management'](#)

frequent fainting, dizziness, miscarriages, standing for eight-to-twelve hours, and alternating day/night shift work. The lack of proper chemicals management revealed by the Samsung whistleblower is consistent with some of the health effects reported by women workers in the 2017 report.

Samsung's response to the information revealed by its own workers in the CGFED-IPEN report was to threaten their employees with firing and lawsuits if they talked to any outsider. The company tried to prevent the release of report and later mounted an attack campaign in the Vietnamese press. The situation became so extreme, three UN Special Rapporteurs issued a [statement](#) on the matter expressing concern about intimidation.

Samsung dominates the global phone market as well as the electronics sector and economy of Vietnam, where 50% of its smart phones are produced. The electronics sector is a significant area of growth for Vietnam, as electronics exports outpace other exports. However, Vietnam has no labor codes specifically protecting the health of electronics industry workers, who are overwhelmingly women.

“Unlike South Korea, where regulations have become stricter, environmental crimes are being committed at Samsung's factories in Vietnam along with poor labor safety and health management,” said Mr. Sangsoo Lee, SHARPS. “In this regard, Samsung Electronics' relocation to Vietnam is not only to lower wages, but also to reduce environmental safety and health costs. The toxicity of the electronics industry, which had been transferred from the US to South Korea, has now been outsourced to Southeast Asia in a more dangerous form.”

“Samsung needs to be held accountable for violations of international labor standards and national laws in Vietnam, South Korea, and wherever they produce their products,” said Ms. Pham Thi Minh Hang from CGFED. “Samsung should fulfill the [right](#) to safe and healthy environment and support the [right](#) to form independent trade unions. Rather than trying to suppress independent research, Samsung needs to acknowledge that additional independent health studies are necessary to fully understand the extent of the occupational health impacts on workers, including exposures to toxic chemicals.”

“Worker and community right to know is a key chemical [safety principle](#),” said Mr. Joe DiGangi, PhD, IPEN Special Advisor. “While we encourage more whistleblowers to come forward, we should not have to depend on them to provide the kinds of revelations in the Newstapa reports. Samsung and other companies have a duty to publicly provide health and safety information about their emissions and the chemicals they use.”

“We believe that workers have a fundamental right to talk about their working conditions and that they deserve to have their voices heard,” said Ms. Pham Thi Minh Hang from CGFED. “If Samsung is fully confident about its working conditions, it should issue a public statement together with the Government of Vietnam, that workers are free to discuss their working conditions with the news media and civil society organizations.”

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Supporters for the Health and Rights of People in the Semiconductor Industry (SHARPS) supports the recognition of occupational diseases for victims in the semiconductor and electronics industries, monitors and investigates the corporate working environment, and works to improve health and safety policies including right to know.

Founded in 1993, the **Research Centre for Gender, Family and Environment in Development (CGFED)** has been carrying out social scientific research and intervention activities, targeting at women's development and gender equity. As one among the first Vietnamese public interest non-governmental organizations (NGO), CGFED is proud of its work building the foundation and the development of a young NGO community among members of the Vietnamese civil society.

IPEN is a network of non-governmental organizations working in more than 100 countries to reduce and eliminate the harm to human health and the environment from toxic chemicals.