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## Sandblasting Of Denim in Turkey

Approximately eight to ten thousand workers live not knowing that they are in danger of an illness, more than half of these are affected but not aware of their illness, hundreds more of them fight against this illness and unfortunately many of them have lost their lives to this illness.

In Turkey the laborers who work in the sandblasting of denim develop the illness called silicosis.

It is estimated that at least eight to ten thousand workers have been employed in sandblasting workplaces. Particularly from 2000 onwards, the sandblasting of denim was extremely widespread in the garment sector.

Silicosis is one of the oldest occupational diseases. It occurs most frequently in the industries of mining, ceramics manufacturing, tunnel and road construction, and iron foundries, among others, due to high exposure to silica dust (granite, stone – sand's dust). Although widespread throughout the world, the first time this disease was associated anywhere with the sandblasting of denim was in Turkey in 2005.

As the name implies, 'sandblasting' is the erosive/abrasive process applied to denim using air compressors to blow out sand under pressure in order to bleach and to batter the denim. Exposure to intense dust by inhalation of the particles present in the workshop atmosphere during this process causes silicosis in the lungs.

The illness generally occurs after 20-30 years of exposure in the mining industry; on the other hand, in the case of sandblasting where the laborers are exposed to intense dust, it may occur in less than 1 year, even after only 6 months of exposure. There is as yet no known cure for this illness.

Silicosis is classified as an "occupational disease" in the sandblasting of denim. WHO accepts that silicosis is a work-related illness caused by inhaling the sand's dust and that it is most definitely preventable.

The majority of workers are employed informally (without any social security). There are many foreign and child workers among them who are employed illegally and without social security. We know that there are many foreign laborers from Romania, Moldavia, Azerbaijan and Georgia who were employed illegally and who have subsequently died in their home countries of this fatal illness.

Responsible parties are not necessarily the small workplaces but rather the big multinational companies. Many attempt to present the sandblasting of denim as the responsibility of an individual enterprise, but it must be recognized that this process is actually demanded by the global brands. We conducted many interviews with former workers. They clearly recalled and pronounced brands such as LEVI'S, STROM JEANS, COLLEZIONE, DOLCE & GABBANA, LITTLE BIG, ADİL IŞIK, MAVİ JEANS, and the like. Apart from their testimonies, we lack any document or evidence to prove these claims.



## **WE, AS LABORERS DISEASED OF SILICOSIS IN TURKEY, CALL ALL WORLD LABORERS TO SUPPORT OUR FIGHT.**

Sandblasting of denim has been forbidden in Europe since the 1960's. After the prohibition of sandblasting in Europe, manufacturing moved into other countries like Turkey, Bangladesh and Syria. There are countless illegal and child laborers involved in this work without social security, as, unfortunately, it is a way of cutting costs. But the real responsibility of this calamity lies with the big multinational companies who carry on business with subcontractors in different regions of the world without any regard to the serious threats caused to the health and lives of the workers.

Manufacturing and sales of 'sandblasted' jeans must be prohibited all over the world. The Turkish Government has been inactive in this process for a long time due to ongoing international competition. Since March 2009 denim sandblasting has been banned in Turkey by the Ministry of Health. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Labor and Social Security have not taken any action in accordance with the decision of the Ministry of Health.

All sandblasting laborers' health care, including all physical examinations and treatments should be assured by the government, regardless of the workers' social security status. The workers who are diagnosed as sick should benefit from social security and pensions without delay, even during the ongoing lawsuit period.

All authorities who are responsible for the victims of silicosis should be held responsible by law for not performing necessary inspections and not fulfilling their duties.

A commission should be constituted from representatives of the trade associations and trade unions concerned, as well as from the Ministry of Labor and Social Security, in order to determine the average disability of and compensation for laborers without delay.

'National Strategy for Pneumoconiosis Prevention' (2007) prepared by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security in accordance with resolutions of Joint ILO-WHO Committee on Occupational Health and Safety should be carried out without any delay.

Sandblasting workers set up a committee on 9 June, 2008: THE SOLIDARITY COMMITTEE OF SANDBLASTING LABORERS. Our committee carries out a support campaign and calls for your support in order to help laborers pay the mandatory fees of the trials and to have voluntary lawyers give their help.