



Denim sandblasting workers in Turkey demand their rights

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ANKARA - Radikal



Workers can contract silicosis during the denim sandblasting process. Hürriyet photo

Workers who have contracted silicosis, a potentially fatal lung disease, due to their jobs sandblasting denim will camp out in Ankara's Abdi İpekçi Park on Tuesday to demand their rights.

The workers will organize meetings with political leaders and deputies and members of parliamentary groups for three consecutive days to try and find a solution to their concerns.

The Committee for Solidarity with Denim Sandblasting Workers, a group established in 2008 and comprised of workers, doctors, lawyers, artists and representatives of trade unions and political parties, has been fighting for the rights of workers with silicosis and the families of those who have died from the disease. According to the committee, sandblasting work has caused 600 cases of silicosis, while 5,000 additional workers wait to be diagnosed.

Workers can contract the lung disease by inhaling the crystalline silica dust released during the sandblasting process, which gives denim a distinctive look. Turkey is the first country where this deadly illness has been detected in the textile sector.

According to the committee's data, workers exposed to the silicosis-causing dust often do not have



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health insurance, since big names in the denim industry use subcontractors to perform the sandblasting process and these firms generally do not insure their workers. Those affected have thus sought legal recourse in order to get their social-security rights. But since they work illegally, they cannot show proof of employment or even details such as their date of hire.

The committee has urged the Ministry of Health to organize an overall campaign throughout the country for the workers to be treated in hospitals that specialize in chronic chest diseases. It is also urging the Ministry for Labor and Social Security to secure health insurance for all workers in the denim-sandblasting sector.

In addition, it has asked the Ministry of Justice to exempt the workers' court fees for related cases and asked the government to step up monitoring efforts and ban the use of silica in such manufacturing processes.