

A Year after the Bangladesh Factory Collapse: Are Workers Safer?



On April 24, 2013, an eight-storey building in Bangladesh containing garment factories collapsed, killing 1,129 people, mostly female workers. And a few months before that tragedy, 112 workers died and around 200 others were injured in another Bangladesh garment factory fire.

These incidents shone a spotlight on the unsafe conditions in which these factory workers were toiling and put pressure on the retailers the factories supplied to stop turning a blind eye to those conditions.

A year later, it's fair to ask: Are factory workers in Bangladesh any safer?

Some of the actions that came out of these factory incidents included inspections of hundreds of plants for safety hazards.

To that end, two groups of retailers were formed to conduct those inspections and address unsafe conditions:

- Bangladesh Accord for Building and Fire Safety, which includes primarily European companies
- Alliance for Bangladesh Worker Safety, whose members are all Canadian or American.

According to a recent *New York Times* article, these groups are trying hard to improve conditions for factory workers, although they have been squabbling on which one has been more successful and which approach is better.

For example, one group makes its inspection reports public, while the other doesn't.

The inspections have led to the closure of several factories deemed unsafe, largely due to structural problems. So there has been some progress in improving safety conditions.

But it seems clear that more still needs to be done. For example, a new study found that although many factories have been inspected, thousands more have yet to be examined.

Hopefully, these two groups will continue to work to make garment factories in

Bangladesh safer.

And all companies should consider the safety records and practices of their suppliers and incorporate Supplier OHS Standards into their agreements with those suppliers.