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Workers inhale deadly asbestos

By GAIL YOAKUM
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AGUA PRIETA — Generally, people here have profited by the settlement of U.S. industrial giants in their impoverished Mexican border town. But the exchange in benefits could in another decade mean death for some of the laborers in one American-owned plant.

Workers in the American Asbestos Textile plant here are being exposed to rock-mineral fibers of asbestos that in 10 to 20 years may inflict disabling lung diseases, including cancer, a Tucson occupational health and lung disease specialist says.

In the past 10 years, U.S. companies have created several thousand jobs and deposited millions of dollars into the local economy by locating plants here. They pay taxes to build houses and to educate Mexican youths.

In turn the town has provided a cheap labor force hungry for jobs. The labor union bends to management wishes and "pacifies troublemakers." The town makes few demands that eat into profits, a factory manager said.

Other U.S. industries have considered crossing the border to avoid tough new U.S. government health regulations that are demanding industry to clean up work environments.

However, most U.S. firms in Mexico have assembly line factories with heavy labor needs. The plants do not have smoke-belching chimneys, water-polluting waste or other visible health hazards.

The asbestos plant proved to be a graphic exception on two recent visits.

An Arizona Daily Star reporter visited the plant twice this month. On the first trip the reporter was accompanied by Dr. William Johnson, a nationally

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Serious business — Workers in the asbestos plant at Agua Prieta are exposed to large amounts of asbestos fibers that scientists say could eventually result in deadly damage to their lungs. (Star photo)

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PLAINTIFF'S EXHIBIT

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