

23 killed in convenience store explosion in Hermosillo, Mexico

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On Saturday, November 1, an explosion at a low-cost retailer in downtown Hermosillo, capital of the state of Sonora in northwestern Mexico, killed 23 people and injured 15 more. Children were among the dead and injured.

Many of the victims were shopping at the Waldo's outlet for supplies for El Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) festivities.

As of this writing, three victims remain hospitalized: 81-year-old Marcos Segundos Reyes, afflicted with third-degree burns on 90 percent of his body; 20-year-old María Isabel Morales Bracamontes, who has been transferred to a hospital in Phoenix, Arizona, for specialist care; and 16-year-old Danna Valeria, who was passing outside the store when the explosion occurred. Their families have expressed gratitude at the outpouring of popular support, including blood donations.

Sonoran Attorney General Gustavo Rómulo Salas Chávez told the media that, based on the initial investigation, most of the deceased died due to “inhalation of toxic gases.”

The State Attorney General's Office (FGJE Sonora) is interviewing public servants at the municipal, state and federal levels, with a focus on the licensing of and permits for the store.

The FGJE quickly identified an electrical transformer as the probable cause of the fire. The explosion was preceded by two brief blackouts; the consequent stress on the transformer likely precipitated the inferno.

Risk management and civil protection consultant Mariano Katase Ruiz, speaking to Hermosillo newspaper *El Imparcial*, said that the Waldo's location had two serious irregularities: improper installation of the transformer indoors and a lack of an emergency exit.

Either of these faults would present an “imminent risk” and should have resulted in authorities closing the establishment, Katase Ruiz told the paper.

“There are two very grave violations,” he said, “a transformer inside the property and a property without emergency exits. From my own very personal point of view, the emergency exit is non-negotiable, if an establishment doesn't have an emergency exit, it cannot operate.”

All indications point to government negligence, if not outright corruption.

State Governing Minister Adolfo Salazar Razo confirmed that the store's civil protection plan was rejected in 2021, under the current administration, and that it had been operating without one since then.

El Mitotero, a local independent journalist who writes under a pseudonym, cited an anonymous source who shared images and information about the transformer, which was effectively a “ticking time bomb.”

“The problem was reported and they ignored it. The transformer was improperly installed, enclosed and without ventilation. ... That was dangerous. I'm doing [sharing] this because what happened hurts me; it could have been avoided,” the source said.

The fire has retraumatized Hermosillans who experienced or remember the June 5, 2009, ABC Day Care Center fire, which killed 49 children and injured dozens more, along with several adults. That fire began in an adjacent part of the improperly converted warehouse containing government financial documents before spreading to the day care.

That tragedy was the result of rank corruption. The facility lacked fire extinguishers and emergency exits but was nevertheless allowed to operate and receive federal funds. It was co-owned by the wives of two state officials from the Institutional Revolutionary

Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI), one of whom was also the cousin of Margarita Zavala, wife of then-President Felipe Calderón of the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN).

Hermosillans, with parents of ABC victims playing a leading role, are demanding action to ensure that such a catastrophe cannot happen again.

The June 5 Movement (El Movimiento de Cinco de Junio), an association of ABC survivors and victims' parents, issued an emotional statement calling for a protest on November 5.

“To the families of the victims of the Waldo’s store fire, we say that you are not alone, just as we have never been. We want you to know that we know exactly what you are going through, that our thoughts and hearts have been with you since the first minute we learned of the magnitude of the fire. We want you to know that for 16 years we have fought to prevent the repetition of a tragedy similar to the one that of our sons and daughters. ... We are sorry, we failed you.”

Hundreds responded to this call and marched to the Government Palace, chanting “49+23, how many more?”, “Never again” and “It was not an accident, it was corruption.”

Rosalinda Ríos, mother of deceased Waldo’s worker Jesús Ana María Cortez Ríos, spoke of her daughter, “She was a responsible young woman and that cost her her life.”

Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum and Sonoran Governor Alfonso Durazo, both members of the National Regeneration Movement (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional, MORENA), expressed their condolences for the victims and promised investigations. The corporate leadership of Waldo’s likewise expressed its condolences.

The crocodile tears of these politicians should be viewed with the same skepticism as those of the business owners. MORENA, no less than the PRI and PAN, is committed to the maintenance of private property and the subordination of Mexico to US imperialism, even under fascist President Donald Trump.

It is impossible to secure safe working conditions and public spaces within this framework. While certain of the issues involved are more endemic, or at least more prominent, in “developing” countries like Mexico, conditions in the imperialist centers are regressing due

to the decades-long social counterrevolution, which is being rapidly accelerated under Trump and other far-right politicians, as evidenced in the frequency of workplace deaths in America’s own industrial slaughterhouse.

To secure their social rights and living standards, workers on both sides of the border must unite in an international movement for democratic workers’ control over production and economic planning, that is, for socialism.



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