

“Things like this happen everywhere”: Residents of Hermosillo, Mexico speak on Waldo’s explosion

Our reporters

28 November 2025

The *World Socialist Web Site* recently spoke to Hermosillo residents about the November 1 explosion at a Waldo’s convenience store, which killed 24 people and injured at least a dozen more.

Reports indicate that a fire began at an electrical transformer improperly installed inside the store before causing an explosion. The store lacked basic safety measures, such as emergency exits, and had been operating without a civil protection plan since 2021.

The death toll rose to 24 after 81-year-old Marco Segundo Reyes, a Waldo’s worker, succumbed to his injuries on November 7.

The tragedy is still a raw nerve in Hermosillo, the capital of the state of Sonora in northwestern Mexico. At the corner of the block where the explosion happened, residents have set up a memorial to the victims, including signs demanding, “No more tragedies ... no more victims.”

Bertha, a Telmex employee with decades of experience, told the WSWs that she had been in the area when the explosion happened.

“I was here that day, when we heard the noise, the big noise, and then we saw a lot of smoke. Then we started running. The people, all the people were confused, and me too. Then we found out that the fire was here, and we had to wait. The police came immediately, and then they started saying that there were six dead, and then, you know? Ten, 20, and there were two pregnant women, and that was very sad. And that’s all I can say, because I can’t find the words to express my feelings.”

She rejected the explanation that this was a simple accident. “What the news says here on the radio or on TV, about what happened ... they say it was an accident or something like that. And the people, they just say no, right? That it was ... intentional, yes, there were bad intentions.”

To the extent that the investigation by the State Attorney General’s Office (FGJE Sonora) is not a cover-up, it is widely expected that it will reveal government corruption at multiple levels.

José, a meatpacking worker on a disability pension, emphasized the failure of government oversight. He said the

explosion was caused by “poor safety management, they didn’t inspect it properly. They would just come and do a quick check and leave. They only based it on what they were told. They would file the report and leave. But they didn’t really check. They didn’t do the job properly.”

When asked about working conditions more broadly in the country, he bluntly stated that they were, “Well, bad. Yes, very bad ... throughout the whole country.

“Things like this happen everywhere. Another similar incident just happened in Veracruz.”

José also experienced unsafe conditions at his job at Bachoco, a multinational poultry company, including rapid temperature changes and repeated ammonia exposures, contributing to his disability.

Norma Corona, a homemaker, was at her grandmother’s house a few blocks away when the explosion happened. “I didn’t hear the explosion, but I heard the noise of the police, the firefighters, ambulances,” she said.

“I think a quicker response from the firefighters was needed, based on what I saw and how they acted at the time, because I did see that the police arrived first instead of the firefighters. ... The way they do it here, where the police arrive first, is something that needs to be improved and worked on; the efficiency of the response team needs to be prioritized.”

She added, “I think that corruption in the country has a lot to do with it, which is one of the main reasons why it happened there because they neglected security, right? ... In general, I think there is a great lack of security. And even more so knowing about the issue from the perspective of my cousin specifically, who works directly with civil protection. What she has also told me is that the same corruption that exists causes everything to be overlooked when it needs more attention. But in general, there is a lot of work that needs to be done on that.”

Pablo, a security guard at a residential complex, said, “If civil protection did its job properly and checked what it’s supposed to check, none of this would have happened.”

When asked about the government’s response to the inferno, he affirmed: “Well, I say that the government has something to do with this, because if there wasn’t so much corruption, as I

explained earlier, none of this would've happened. In fact, many of us are fed up with all the bribery here on the part of the government with the business owners."

Daniel and his partner waited to speak to our reporters. Daniel's partner said of the impact on Waldo's workers, "I feel that this is an injustice, because they're just normal people who simply came to work and do their jobs every day."

She had worked for over a decade at Liverpool, a large department store, until a recent incident when she and her coworkers smelled toxic gasses. "Out of nowhere, it smells bad, it smells bad, it smells bad," she recalled.

Managers ignored it, "Like nothing happened. In my opinion, you could have been getting poisoned. And they didn't do anything. [Coworkers said,] 'I'm dizzy,' and, 'I feel sick.' [The company said,] 'No, you stay here, keep working, keep working.'

"The next day we arrived, and it was like nothing happened. We heard through gossip and from the store ... oh, they paid the fine. But they're working like nothing happened."

Many interviewees noted parallels between the Waldo's fire and a fire at the ABC Daycare in 2009, which killed nearly 50 children and injured dozens more, including several adult caretakers.

Daniel noted that, while the ABC fire had a larger death toll and affected children, the most vulnerable, there were parallels between the incidents that pointed to the government.

"I strongly, strongly disagree with the government because currently the government is doing very badly. We've all already seen what happened with the march and all that protest and everything that happened at the kindergarten. ... But more than anything, what happened was due to negligence, to not checking, to not having proper surveillance."

Pablo, the security guard, said it was similar to the 2009 fire "because the government was also involved in the ABC Daycare fire. Just like here. They didn't do their job properly here."

ABC Daycare had numerous safety faults but nevertheless operated and received federal funds. It was co-owned by two women, one of whom was the cousin of then-President Felipe Calderón's wife, and both were married to Sonoran officials.

Norma declared that the situations were "exactly the same," noting "a lack of security in terms of civil protection, failing to comply with the guidelines and the structures that should be in place for emergency situations like these."

Interviewees also stressed that workers everywhere, not just in countries like Mexico with particularly dangerous working conditions, needed to be vigilant. Pablo, given the opportunity to address his fellow workers globally through the WSWs, encouraged them to "be more vigilant and that any detail they see in their workplaces, they should report it, or if not, they should leave immediately."

Yet they also discussed some of the factors impeding a worker-led safety regime and emphasized that workplace safety

is not an individual problem with an individual solution.

José stressed, "Well, I would say that the government needs to get its act together here. They need to take things seriously and put competent people in charge, not just people who are occupying the position and that's it, they're going to fulfill their hours and leave, no. They should go into the stores, inspect them, check them, and those people shouldn't stay in the position for a long time. They should be replaced. ... There are many qualified people."

Norma noted the connections between wages, job insecurity and working conditions. "First and foremost, if salaries are also a factor, then that aspect should be improved as well, so that everything improves in general. Because if you don't have a good salary, people don't demand more; they don't care about the working conditions. Due to their own needs, working people are limited to a certain level, precisely because they need their jobs so much that they settle for any job, really. So they don't pay attention to the workplace or the work environment itself, simply because they need to receive a paycheck."

These comments point to the need for a broad movement of the working class to fight for higher wages, safe working conditions and other social rights. This movement can only be successful to the extent that it spreads beyond any single workplace, sector or even country. The International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees (IWA-RFC) is leading this fight, having assisted workers in several countries in establishing rank-and-file committees, creating a structure to allow workers to fight back internationally.

The Waldo's explosion illustrates to the need to develop a network of rank-and-file committees in Mexico, linking their struggles up with the struggles of workers in the US fighting against industrial slaughterhouses and the fascist, anti-immigrant policies of the Trump administration. Central to this will be the development of socialist consciousness throughout the hemisphere, as part of the fight of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) for the United Socialist States of the Americas.



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