

Taiwan factory workers win \$18 mn over cancer deaths

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Workers from a factory in Taiwan which leached toxic chemicals they say resulted in 200 deaths from cancer and more than 1,000 other cases of the disease won a Tw\$564.45 million (\$18 million) payout from US electronics company RCA on Friday.

A summary of the verdict in the long-running legal battle by former workers at the RCA factory in northern Taoyuan found that groundwater at the site had been contaminated with various hazardous chemicals which could cause cancer.

It added that the level of [organic solvents](#) in the soil and groundwater at the factory, which closed more than 20 years ago, seriously exceeded standards.

"According to an expert witness... there is cause and effect between the damages to the plaintiffs' and their family members' health and long-term exposure to organic solvents," the statement said.

Workers were directly exposed to the solvents without any protection and the company also failed to conduct health checks which are required by law, it added.

"RCA repeatedly violated the laws .. which subjected the plaintiffs and their relatives to excessive exposure at work," it said.

But campaigners were hesitant to celebrate as they had hoped for a much

bigger Tw\$2.7 billion payout.

"The workers have a partial victory today but this is belated justice," said Joseph Lin, the lead lawyer of the plaintiffs' legal team.

"We hope this case will set up a precedent against irresponsible international and Taiwanese corporations and help protect workers," he said.

RCA set up the factory in 1970. It was later acquired by US firm General Electronics (GE) and then France's Thomson Consumer Electronics (Bermuda) Ltd. before closing in 1992.

TCEB was also held liable for compensation.

Around 80 former RCA workers and their families gathered outside the courthouse in downtown Taipei after the ruling, displaying a white banner reading "poisoned workers, immediate compensation".

They held up photos of workers who had died, with captions listing the type of cancer they suffered from.

"The compensation amount is absurdly low since hundreds of people died and so many got sick. We must appeal," said Huang Yun-ping, whose sister worked for nearly 20 years at RCA and died of colon cancer.

But others said they wanted to put the case to rest.

"I am glad we won the case even though the compensation is lower than what we requested. I would prefer not to appeal as I just want to put an end to all this and move on," said Cheng Ruei-ling, 62, who worked for RCA for 20 years and has breast cancer.

The legal battle was launched over a decade ago by the RCA Self-Help Association, which represents 529 former workers, including relatives of 47 people who had died.

Lawyers for the plaintiffs said they are yet to decide whether to appeal the ruling.

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