

classification system (HS) provides a separate classification for protective goggles for "workers employed in hazardous work," the Mexican government does not report its import statistics at that level of detail.

According to estimates by the United States Department of Commerce, the American share of the import market is about two-thirds for personal security products and more than three-quarters for fire and occupational safety equipment. By those estimates, Canada has a 3 percent share of the fire abatement equipment market and a 1.4 percent share of the market for personal security equipment.

## OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY

*Mexico's industrial accident rate has fallen steadily over the past several years, but the concept of controlling hazards at their source rather than with personal protective equipment is still new.*

According to official government statistics, there were more than 437,000 occupational accidents and illnesses in Mexican private-sector workplaces during 1995. Total lost time was 11 million days. These include only incidents within the jurisdiction of the *Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social (IMSS)*, Mexican Institute for Social Security, which covers private-sector workers. Public-sector employees are covered by the *Instituto de Seguridad y Servicios Sociales de los Trabajadores del Estado (ISSSTE)*, Institute of Security and Social Services for Public Sector Employees. It reported only 1,335 accidents during the first eight months of 1995.

Data published by the *IMSS* indicates that Mexican workplaces have been gradually getting safer. Between 1986 and 1995, the average number of accidents per 100 workers declined from 9.1 to 5.0. This trend may be partly due to changes in industrial coverage over the period, and many industries have much higher rates. However, over the same period, the rate for accidents causing permanent disability rose from 30.9 per 1,000 workers to 39.8. These statistics are not considered very reliable by many observers, and the true rates are probably a great deal higher.

A large proportion of Mexican workers are employed in the "informal" economy and are not covered by the social security system. They are self-employed or work for small unregistered companies, many of which are family-based. For example, it has been estimated that as much as half of all construction-industry employment is in the informal sector. Nationally, the insured private work-force was only 8.8 million in 1995, only about 9 percent of the population. In an interview, officials from the *Secretaría del Trabajo y Previsión Social (STPS)*, Secretariat of Labour and Social Welfare, suggested that overall, Mexico's industrial accident rate is about 25 percent higher than most industrialized countries.