

# *30,000 Left Jobless in the Wake of Mexico Fireworks Explosion*

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Mexico City, December 24 (RHC)-- More than 30,000 people lost their job and their only source of income following the deadly explosion at a fireworks market in Tultepec, State of Mexico, which has left at least 33 people dead and dozens injured, according to local authorities.

Tultepec, about 25 miles from Mexico City, is known for its pyrotechnics industry, with nearly 20 percent of its 151,000 residents having some connection to pyrotechnics production.

Every year, the town holds a weeklong festival with fireworks competitions among producers. The "Cueteros" as they are known have huge production workshops where they handle gunpowder and other high-risk chemicals. Permits for these places are granted by the Mexican Secretariat of National Defense.

Due to the high risk of the materials, production is 100 percent handmade. No machinery can be used and electricity is also prohibited at the workshops. It is a tradition that dates back more than 150 years. The town produces 90 percent of the pyrotechnics used throughout Mexico.

The finished product is sold to wholesalers at the San Pablito market, whose permits and security are also provided by the Defense Ministry. During the explosion on December 20, the popular market was devastated as the fire reduced the 300 stalls to ashes. Some 300 sellers and at least 2,000 buyers were

present when the blast took place in the makeshift, open-air market.

Forensic scientists have only been able to identify 19 of the victims since the remains are burned or heavily damaged, meaning DNA tests have been required. At least 72 people, most of them children, are being treated for severe burns injuries. Authorities said that 13 minors who suffered burns to more than 90 percent of their bodies are being sent to Galveston, Texas for treatment.

Meanwhile, authorities in the State of Mexico, a political stronghold of the President Enrique Peña Nieto's PRI political party, have not taken responsibility and have shifted focus on the tragedy to the military.

Similar events have occurred before in Tultepec, however, authorities have not placed further regulations on fireworks sales, leaving these artisans, many of whom are low-income artisans, with little protection.

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