

## Overwork blamed for record-high 34 foreign trainee deaths

Kyodo News

Thirty-four people involved in training programs for non-Japanese died in fiscal 2008, up 13 from the previous year and marking a record high, according to a survey by a government-linked training body.

The leading causes of death were brain and heart disease, which claimed 16 lives, while five trainees were killed in work-related accidents and four died in traffic accidents. Supporters of foreign trainees said they suspect many of the deaths blamed on brain and heart disorders were actually the result of overwork.

The Japan International Training Cooperation Organization, which conducted the survey, said the 34 who died were mostly in their 20s and 30s and that the ratio of brain and heart disease was roughly double that of Japanese in the same age bracket.

Shoichi Ibusuki, a lawyer supporting foreign trainees and interns, pointed out that many trainees have been forced to work long hours for lower wages. He is among those who believe many of the deaths were due to overwork.

Ibusuki and other supporters submitted a written inquiry to the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry on Monday, requesting an investigation into the causes of the trainees' deaths and to state how it will handle the matter.

Following the inquiry, three Chinese trainees slammed their work conditions at a news conference in Tokyo.

Ding Jianhui, 35, who came to Japan in September 2006 on the training program, said he had to work 100 to 130 hours of overtime a month selling scrap metal and only received ¥110,000 per month after

taxes.

"I lived in a container that was not equipped with a bathroom and was treated as cheap labor. My back is still numb," said Ding, who claims he was suddenly fired late last year.

Jiang Xiangyi, 34, said although he was told before he came to Japan he would be working in carpentry, his actual job was removing asbestos.

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