

Norma Alejandra Quilantán Castañón, a dedicated public servant in Mexico with over 27 years of experience, shares a powerful testimony about her transition from living with manageable asthma to suffering from a debilitating condition known as Multiple Chemical Sensitivity (MCS). Her health began to decline rapidly in 2024 because of her workplace environment. She worked in an enclosed office with poor ventilation, where the constant use of cleaning products, air fresheners, and scented diffusers became toxic to her body. Her symptoms started as minor fatigue and throat irritation and evolved into severe respiratory attacks and physical collapse triggered by common scents like perfumes and disinfectants. Despite her formal diagnosis and a legal ruling recognizing her condition as an occupational risk, Norma faced deep institutional resistance; her colleagues mocked her symptoms, and her workplace failed to make the necessary changes to keep her safe. This experience highlights a critical gap in Mexico's healthcare and labour systems, where MCS remains largely invisible and misunderstood.

Her story serves as an urgent plea for policymakers to move beyond symbolic gestures and implement real, tangible changes that ensure inclusion and safety for the MCS community. This requires formal recognition of the condition within medical and labour frameworks, clear protocols for fragrance-free environments, and enforcement of air quality standards in public buildings to prevent others from falling ill. Furthermore, because chemical exposure is a global issue, greater collaboration between countries and international medical associations is urgently needed. By working together to harmonize research, share management strategies, and standardize treatment, the global community can create a unified front that validates the experiences of patients like Norma. Protecting health and dignity in the workplace must become a shared international priority, ensuring that those living with "invisible" conditions are no longer forced to choose between their careers and their lives.