

Canaries in the Mine

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I said, "Look there, in the rafters - a swallow's made her nest"
As she glided through the aircraft plant, I felt that I'd been
blest
But her wings just couldn't hold her, and she fell down on the
floor
That day the ground was littered with at least a dozen more

Some of us got worried, and we picked up five or six
And sent them to a lab to find out what had made them sick
The lab said it had lost them, but dead birds don't fly away
That night the guards shot down the rest, and took them all away

Swallows in the rafters, canaries in the mine
Tell us we've been poisoned, we're running out of time

Two pregnant gals I know of lost their babies at that place
I've seen lots of workers fainting, dragged out, and soon replaced
We see the company doctors, and they say it's in our heads
Or they say we've got the flu, we should go home and go to bed

Some of us get headaches, and we throw up everyday
Some of us get rashes, some that never go away
We feel depressed and angry, some have nearly lost their minds
Some have tried to take their lives, I nearly lost a friend of
mine CHORUS

We know that we've been poisoned by that damned formaldehyde
And we've learned we'll have to live with this until the day we
die
We fear we'll lose our jobs if we protest or file a claim
But we must not be silent or we, too, will share the blame

I think about the swallows, then I think about the times
When the miners used canaries to give warning in the mine
And if the bird fell dead, the miners knew to get away
The swallows are all dead, my God, how can they make us stay? CHORUS 2x

Notes:

Chemical poisoning in the workplace is shaping up to be one of
the primary issues for unions in the 90's. This story was
inspired by interviews with Boeing workers.