

Hundreds of Chinese villagers protest lead poisoning

Friday 30 October 2009, by [FORD Peter](#), [LI Xinran](#), [LIN Kevin](#), [MOORE Malcolm](#) (Date first published: 18 September 2009).

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By Li Xinran

Source: *Shanghai Daily*. 2009-9-18

HUNDREDS of residents in a township in east China's Fujian Province gathered in front of the local government offices yesterday afternoon to protest a factory they believe caused lead poisoning in several children.

The demonstration took place in Jiaoyang Township, Shanghang County, after at least four children were found to have excessive lead levels in their blood, Xinhua news agency reported. Villagers charged that the pollution came from the nearby Huaqiang Battery Factory.

Officials from Longyan City and Shanghang County governments visited the township yesterday to talk with the villagers but failed to settle the dispute, Xinhua said.

The villagers blocked a highway for several hours in the morning, according to the news agency.

Because of lead poisoning fears, 136 students were absent from the Central Primary School of Jiaoyang Township yesterday and 140 stayed out of kindergarten. The primary school's headmaster, Zou Chaolin, told Xinhua that even more students were absent on Wednesday.

The county government said that among 72 children who had taken blood tests, four exhibited excessive lead levels, or more than 100 micrograms per liter of blood, compared with the normal level of zero to 100µg. The other 68 children recorded levels of 53 to 100µg.

The county government has ordered the environmental protection bureau to increase supervision of the plant.

The Fujian incident was the fourth such case in China since June, following lead poisonings in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region and Hunan and Shaanxi provinces that sickened more than 2,000 children and dozens of workers.

Among them, over 40 workers at the Huanjiang Steel Plant in Guangxi's Hechi City recently were found to have excessive lead in their blood. Dilapidated environment protection equipment was blamed for the problem.

The Huanjiang factory was added to the list of steel plants that needed to be shut down in 2008

because it did not meet environmental standards, according to earlier media reports.

Production in the factory has been halted.

Shaanxi Province shut down a smelting plant amid public anger over heavy metal discharges by the factory that left 851 children ill last month.

Earlier, Hunan Province closed a smelter and detained two of its executives after more than 1,300 local children suffered lead poisoning.

Protest against suspected lead pollution continues in E China

SHANGHANG, Fujian, Sept. 18 (Xinhua) — Protest against a battery factory suspected of causing lead pollution in east China continued Friday, as nearly 100 villagers gathered in front of the local government of Jiaoyang Township, Fujian Province.

The villagers demanded the Huaqiang Battery Factory move out of the township. The crowd dispersed during the afternoon.

Ding Yanzhi, head of the township government, said the factory has been ordered to suspend operation and efforts to clean up the environment around it were under way.

In a move to put more pressure on the local government, all the dealers at a local open fair with 192 stalls suspended their businesses Friday.

“We want the government to make the factory move out as soon as possible,” said one dealer, who requested anonymity.

Ding said the local government would organize tests on blood lead levels for all children in the township.

Amid fears of lead poisoning, hundreds of children were absent from the local primary school and kindergarten Friday.

At least four children in Jiaoyang have been found to have excessive lead levels their blood, which their parents said was a result of pollution from the factory.

Officials from the governments of Longyan City and Shanghang County went to the township Thursday to talk with the villagers. But no agreement was reached.

The villagers blocked a highway for several hours Thursday morning in a protest aimed at the township government.

The county government has ordered its environmental protection bureau to beef up supervision of the plant.

The Shanghang County government said Thursday that among 72 children in Jiaoyang who had taken blood tests, four had excessive lead levels — more than 100 mg a liter of blood, compared with the normal standard of zero to 100 mg a liter. The other 68 children had 53 to 100 mg of lead a liter of blood.

Hundreds of students absent from schools amid lead poisoning fears in E China

SHANGHANG, Fujian Province, Sept. 17 (Xinhua) — Hundreds of children were absent from schools

amid fears of lead poisoning in Shanghang County, east China's Fujian Province.

A total of 136 students were absent from the Central Primary School of Jiaoyang Township Thursday and 140 others from the local kindergarten, the primary school's headmaster Zou Chaolin said more students were absent Wednesday.

The county government said that among 72 children who had taken blood tests, four have excessive lead levels in their blood, or more than 100 mg a liter of blood, compared with the normal zero to 100 mg a liter. The other 68 children have 53-100 mg of lead a liter of blood.

Residents in Jiaoyang Township said the excessive levels of lead in blood might be caused by a local battery plant.

The county government has ordered the environmental protection bureau to beef up supervision on the plant.

At least 121 children living around a battery factory in eastern China are suffering from lead poisoning, according to officials.

By Malcolm Moore in Shanghai

Source: *The Telegraph* (UK), 27 Sep 2009

The scandal is the latest in a string of heavy metal poisoning cases caused by lax regulation at Chinese factories.

Increasing public anger over the nation's blighted countryside has forced China's leaders to tighten environmental standards and may yet pressure Beijing into a more proactive stance at the United Nations climate change talks in Copenhagen at the end of the year.

According to the local government, doctors tested almost 300 children under the age of 14 in Shanghang county, Fujian province, and found 121 of them to show signs of lead poisoning. An investigation has begun, officials said.

The children lived close to the Huaqiang Battery Plant, which was shut ten days ago after villagers approached the authorities with test results showing that some residents had been poisoned.

"I hope the factory will be shut down forever, otherwise I am planning to move out," said a woman surnamed Yuan who lives within half a mile of the factory. Her 11-year-old son tested positive for lead poisoning.

"I'm very worried about my child and hope the government can work out a plan to help the children expel the lead from their blood," she said.

Lead is particularly toxic to children and can interfere with the heart, stomach, kidneys, reproductive and nervous systems. It also causes learning and behavioural disorders that can be irreversible.

Several clusters of lead poisoning have emerged in recent weeks in an indictment of the Chinese government's failure to develop health tests for the long-term build-up of heavy metals. Decades of

breakneck industrial development have left many regions polluted with chemicals and heavy metals.

At the end of August, over 1,300 children in Hunan province who lived around a manganese factory were diagnosed with lead poisoning. The manganese plant reportedly opened in May 2008 without the approval of the local environmental protection bureau and within a third-of a mile of a primary school and a kindergarten.

In a separate case in the northern province of Shanxi last month, 615 children tested positive for poisoning from a nearby smelter, which was eventually shut down after protests.

Will Chinese poisoning expand to their investments abroad?

2009 August 22

By Kevin Li

In this photo taken on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2009, village children affected by lead poisoning from the Dongling Lead and Zinc Smelting Co. plant receive medical treatment at a hospital in Fengxiang county, west of Xi'an, China. More than 1,300 children have been sickened by lead poisoning in Hunan province, the second such case involving a large number of children this month, state media said Thursday. (AP Photo/Andy Wong)

In this photo taken on Wednesday, Aug. 19, 2009, village children affected by lead poisoning from the Dongling Lead and Zinc Smelting Co. plant receive medical treatment at a hospital in Fengxiang county, west of Xi

The two cases of lead poisoning and a case of cadmium poisoning in China this month alarmed us the use of toxic metals in the consumer products. However, enforcement of domestic regulations may not stop the accidents from happening in other parts of the world if we cannot trace back the source of minerals from the end of the supply chain.

Both lead and cadmium are the major materials for the rechargeable battery's electrodes. In the era of economic recession, the battery industry can still expand their business as new technology is emerging, and rechargeable batteries are widely applied in most electronic products. The industry is also stretching its arms into the business of electric automotive while most people conceive it as more environmentally friendly.

China, as one of the biggest manufacturer countries in the world, is seeking to secure the mineral resources, not only domestically, but also in the other parts of world. These moves ensure the supply of such metals and help the country maintain its export and economic growth. However, pursuit of economic growth will sacrifice the people and the environment throughout the entire supply chain.

Childrens' suffering from lead poisoning is already tragic. But the suffering does not end up here. Lack of precautionary measure led to workers' poisoning of lead in a battery factory in Guangdong. It was also reported that lead poisoning in Guangdong's battery factory is quite popular.

This is not the first case, as cadmium poisoning in battery factory was exposed five years ago, and now expands to the villagers living around the smelters. As China did not ban the use of the two

toxic metals, the mining and refinery processes, which we see a trend of an expansion abroad, will continue to hurt the people and environment inside the country.

Chinese acquisition of mineral abroad, poisoning may follow

With loose environmental regulations, weak awareness of occupational health and safety, and the political repression, people in African countries are as weak as their Chinese counterparts in avoiding the toxic contamination.

Chinese mining companies are securing new mines in Africa. China's biggest nickel mining company, Jinchuan Nickel Group will buy 70% share of Munali Nickel Mine in Zambia. China's Zhonghui Mining Group will also build copper mines in Zambia. China Non-ferrous Metals Industry acquired a copper mine in Zambia. These are only the deals signed recently. Chinese companies also acquired lead-zinc mines and other copper mines in the recent years. Nickel is also one of the metals used in rechargeable battery.

Last year, workers at the Zambia's Chambishi copper mine protested for being dismissed by their Chinese employers. If Chinese investors did not realized their responsibilities to the workers, the villagers and the environment, just like what they are doing domestically, more conflicts between Chinese management and the workers, either local or from China, will occur. Earlier this month, there was already a clash between the Chinese and Algerian people for numerous reasons like job security, economic advantage and cultural differences.

If we cannot leverage each part of the supply chain, from mining to battery production, toxic metal poisoning of the villagers, workers and the environment will not limit to China, but will expand beyond the border, and lead to bigger conflicts and damage the international relations and image of China. Not to say Tibet that serve as the biggest mineral reserve for China.

Lead poisoning scandals highlight China's lack of oversight

2009 August 22

by Globalization Monitor

Photo: A child is treated for lead poisoning Friday at a hospital in Changsha, Hunan province, China. The government has detained two factory officials after 1,300 children living near a manganese smelting plant in the province were found to have drastically elevated levels of lead in their blood. The case comes days after tests determined that pollution from a lead smelter in another province has sickened hundreds. Andy Wong/AP

Parents protest as tests show more than 2,000 children affected. Two new cases show that pollution regulations are often not enforced.

**By Peter Ford | Staff writer of *The Christian Science Monitor*
from the August 21, 2009 edition**

Beijing - Two lead poisoning scandals that have recently sickened more than 2,000 Chinese children point to the ignorance, the push for profits and jobs, and lax government oversight behind much of

China's pollution.

In two separate lead poisoning cases to come to light this month, children living and going to school in the shadow of smelters belching toxic fumes have been found to have up to ten times the amount of lead in their blood considered safe in China.

"Factory owners pursue maximum profit for very little investment," says Zhang Zhengjie, a researcher at the Environmental Science Research Institute in the industrial city of Shenyang. "Very few equip their factories with environmental protection equipment."

Though this is especially true of small plants, one of the offending smelters now in the public eye, in Changqing, Shaanxi Province, is the fourth largest in the country.

Local officials were keen to attract the company, which began operations in 2006, because of the revenue it generated. The plant contributed 17 percent to the county's GDP, according to the state-run Xinhua news agency. Though the county government pledged to relocate nearly 600 families living within 500 yards of the factory, it has moved only a quarter of them so far.

Protesting pollution

Angry neighbors smashed vehicles and tore down fencing around the plant Monday, after tests showed that nearly 70 percent of their children suffered from excessive levels of lead in their blood.

The disturbance was the latest in a frequently occurring series of "mass incidents" protesting the ill effects of pollution in China.

Heavy metal pollution "is a serious problem in China and there are a lot of cases," says Ma Tianjie, an expert on toxic pollutants with Greenpeace, an environmental watchdog.

Many factories do little or nothing to limit their toxic emissions, Mr. Ma points out, and "local authorities don't usually have the resources to inspect factories regularly" even if officials are worried about pollution.

No law in China obliges polluting companies to disclose what they are emitting into the atmosphere, which facilitates violations of laws setting limits on the emission of pollutants. "People don't know there is toxic stuff coming out of the pipes so they are not as vigilant as they could be," Ma says.

Often, adds Li Bing, who runs the environmental organization "Green Oasis" which has studied lead pollution in Shanghai, "people do not know" that lead is dangerous. "Especially in poor places, awareness of the problem is low," she says.

Plan to close worst offenders

The central government, though, is not unaware of it; in an effort to reduce pollution the current Five Year Plan ordains the closure of small and inefficient metal smelting operations which are the worst offenders.

China has tightened regulations on the use of lead in the last decade, though enforcement is often lax. In 1999, China banned production of leaded gasoline, which contributes to lead in the atmosphere - an effort the US began in 1973.

But medical researchers say that the effects of lead poisoning, ranging from memory loss to damage to the nervous and reproductive systems, will affect thousands of Chinese children the rest of their lives.

“Ordinary people believe that these factories provide jobs, and that’s a good thing,” explains Mr. Zhang. “Only after the projects start to pollute do they realize the problem. Yet it is too late. The cost is already too high.”

More questions than answers for China’s lead victims

Photo: Villagers waited with their children on Tuesday for blood tests at a school in Shaanxi province, in north-central China, where 851 children living near the nation’s fourth-largest smelter have tested positive for lead poisoning since early August.

Source: Reuters, 21 Aug 2009.

By Lucy Hornby

SUNJIANANTOU, China, Aug 21 (Reuters) - Every parent in the village of Sunjianantou knows exactly how much lead is in their child’s blood, after 800 children living near a lead smelter in Shaanxi province tested positive for lead poisoning this month.

But like millions of other Chinese villagers tight up against smelters, industrial plants and mines, the parents of Sunjianantou have very little idea of the dangers of lead poisoning, how it occurs, or how to avoid it.

Nor are they likely to find out.

“Please tell us, can the lead ever go away or not?” asked the mother of 8-year old Pengfei, whose test results of 249 micrograms per litre explain how an active small boy slowly turned wan and listless.

“We get our water from our family well. We have no idea if it is safe enough, or what to do about food. The government isn’t testing adults, so we don’t even know if we are poisoned too.”

The acceptable level of lead in blood in the United States is 10 micrograms per litre, the China Daily said on Friday.

In China, the average level for children under six living in cities is 59.52 micrograms per litre, it added.

This month, two cases of lead poisoning of children living near metals smelters came to light in Chinese villages thousands of kilometers apart, showing the prevalence of the problem.

Parents from Sunjianantou and other villages attacked the Dongling lead smelter this week, after hundreds of children living near the smelter tested with high lead levels.

On Aug 8, parents blocked a road and flipped a police car in Wenping town, southwestern Hunan, in protest against toxins from a manganese smelter. In that town, 1,354 children tested with blood lead levels of over 100 micrograms per litre.

A child who ingests large amounts of lead may develop anaemia, muscle weakness and brain damage. Where poisoning occurs, it is usually gradual.

Protests against pollution are increasingly common in China, though police normally try and nip them in the bud before they become violent. In other cases, officials show up and mollify residents with promises of financial or other aid.

In Sunjianantou, parents who spoke with foreign reporters were visited by local officials and warned not to do so again. At least 10 police cars were stationed outside the idled smelter. A dozen more patrolled the main street.

None of the parents interviewed by Reuters on Friday would give their names.

POLLUTION

“Mass incidents” — or riots and protests — sparked by environmental problems have been rising at a rate of 30 percent per year, according to China’s environmental protection minister, Zhou Shengxian.

At the same time, the boom in metals prices has made investment in mines and smelters very profitable, and dangerously polluting plants have sprung up across the Chinese countryside. Local officials, who worry about losing a large taxpayer and employer and may even have a stake in the projects, often turn a blind eye to safety and environmental violations.

When protests or a crisis does occur, local governments react by shutting the plant, detaining troublesome villagers and paying the rest, or offering emergency medical treatment.

“When a problem bursts out in the media, the government suddenly ‘solves’ it,” said Zhang Jingjing, a lawyer with the Centre for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims.

“But that’s usually not a good result, it’s just a way to make the problem go away.

She is trying to bring a lead poisoning case to court to set a precedent that could be used against polluting plants across China.

In Shaanxi, the mayor of the largest city, Baoji, diffused the situation somewhat by meeting with parents, and answering some questions, the mothers said.

But their most important question — whether the smelter will be permanently shut — remains unanswered, a week before classes are due to start at the small grammar school next door.

The Dongling Group is one of China’s 500 top companies, according to a banner on its plant, and the 100,000-tonne smelter built two years ago is supposed to meet China’s drive for larger, and supposedly safer, plants to replace the smaller, and even more polluting, predecessors.

Children with relatively light poisoning are supposed to be treated at home, but such is the level of distrust of the government that some parents in Sunjianantou are unwilling to give their children the recommended medicine.

“We’ve asked for testing but they said no,” said another mother, whose two children both tested at over 200 micrograms per litre.

“That’s how they keep the numbers down.” (Editing by Jerry Norton)

P.S.

* From Globalization Monitor website, <http://www.globalmon.org.hk/en>.