

# Plant Stormed Over Lead Poisoning Of Children

BEIJING (AP) — Police clashed with residents of two neighboring villages in northern China where nearly all the children were poisoned by lead apparently from a nearby smelter, reports said Monday, the latest sign of growing anger over China's rampant industrial pollution.

Several hundred villagers tore down fences and blocked traffic outside the Dongling Lead and Zinc Smelting Co. in Shaanxi province after news of the poisoning emerged last week, state media and villagers said. Fighting between angry parents and scores of police broke out Sunday, and trucks delivering coal to the plant were stoned.

No immediate word on injuries or arrests was available. Local officials, police and people at the company refused to confirm the reports.

China's breakneck economic development has left much of its soil, air and waterways dangerously polluted, and environmental showdowns with outraged residents are growing. Authorities routinely pledge to close down polluting industries, but often back down because of their importance to the local economy.

At least 615 out of 731 children in two villages near the Dongling smelter have tested positive for lead poisoning, which can damage the nervous and reproductive systems and cause high blood pressure, anemia and memory loss. Lead levels in the children were more than 10 times the level considered safe by China.

Air quality tests done near the smelting plant in Shaanxi found unusually high lead levels, according to the official Xinhua News Agency, although officials say groundwater, surface water, soil and company waste discharge all meet national standards.

Li Li, a resident of Gaozuitou village, located about half a mile (1 kilometer) from the plant, said in a telephone interview that her two daughters began developing blotchy skin, yellowing hair and memory problems as far back as January, but doctors had been unable to explain the cause.

After word broke last week of the lead contamination, Li said she took the girls, aged 9 and 12, in for tests and both were found to have high levels of lead.

Some people have already sent their children to schools farther away, said Li, 36, who said her cabbage and tomato crops have withered as well.

"You can see how bad the pollution is, but we don't have any money. Now, I sleep

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badly and I can't eat well either," Li said.

Local officials plan to relocate all 581 households living within 1,600 feet (500 meters) of the factory in the next two years, according to Xinhua.

It was unclear whether the plant had been closed and what its future might be.

In a separate report Monday, Xinhua said a chemical company boss in central China was sentenced to ten years in jail on Friday for criminal environmental negligence after his plant illegally dumped chemicals into a river in central China's Jiangsu province.

Earlier reports said the Biaoxin Chemical Company in Yancheng city had been illegally dumping chemicals in the Xiangyanggang River since 2007. An investigation was triggered after the plant discharged a massive amount of phenol in February this year, forcing two water plants to shut for three days and cutting water supplies to at least 200,000 people. Phenol is used to make products such as air fresheners, medical ointments, cosmetics and sunscreens.

Biaoxin's chairman, Hu Wenbiao, filed an appeal with the Yancheng Intermediate People's Court on Monday, Xinhua said.

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