China Fireworks Plant Blast Kills 13

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BEIJING (AP) -- A massive explosion ripped through a fireworks factory in northeast China early Monday, killing at least 13 workers, damaging nearby buildings and causing secondary blasts.

In another industrial accident Monday, an elevator plunged on a construction site, killing 11 workers riding in it.

Up to 50 people were working at the fireworks factory in the city of Yichun in Heilongjiang province when it was rocked by the explosion about 9:40 a.m. (0140 GMT), according to a statement posted on the local government's website.

Xinhua News Agency reported the death toll rose to 13 after fires were put out and rescuers were able to safely enter the building.

A total of 148 people were injured by the blast, which could be felt up to 2 miles (5 kilometers) away and smashed windows in the local government offices and other buildings, the statement said.

The tally appeared to include workers at the factory as well as people in the surrounding area, but details were not given.

It wasn't known if all the workers had been accounted for. Calls to the local government and police rang unanswered Monday.

Eyewitness' photos posted to the Internet showed plumes of smoke curled above the plant.

Safety is lax at Chinese fireworks plants, and accidents are common. Dozens of people also die each year from unsafe handling of fireworks while celebrating weddings and traditional holidays.

Investigators were looking into the cause of the elevator accident in the city of Meihekou in the northeastern province of Jilin. The elevator dropped as many as 12 stories, according to a statement from the local government.

Although deadly accidents persist, China has placed an increasing emphasis on improving industrial safety.

Fatalities in the country's notoriously dangerous coal mines decreased to 2,631 last year, compared with a peak of 6,995 deaths in 2002, according to official figures.

That works out to 7.2 deaths a day in 2009, down from 19.1 a day in 2002.

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