Death toll for China fireworks blast rises to 19

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The death toll from a massive explosion at a fireworks factory in northeast China rose Tuesday to at least 19 workers, with five still missing.

Up to 50 people were working at the fireworks factory in the Heilongjiang province city of Yichun when it was rocked by the explosion Monday, damaging nearby buildings and sparking secondary blasts, according to a statement on the local government's website.

Xinhua News Agency reported the death toll rose to 19 on Tuesday, with five missing.

A total of 153 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, Xinhua said.

The tally appeared to include workers at the factory as well as people in the surrounding area, but the report gave no details.

State television video showed plumes of smoke curling 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.

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