Officials Shut Fireworks Plants after Blast

In this Monday, Aug. 16, 2010 photo, police and firemen work to extinguish fires at a fireworks factory after an explosion in Yichun, in northeast China's Heilongjiang province. The death toll from a massive explosion at the fireworks factory in northeast China rose Tuesday to at least 19 workers, with five still missing. (AP Photo)

BEIJING (AP) — All nine fireworks factories in Heilongjiang province in northeast China were ordered shut Thursday, days after a blast at one of them killed 20 people.

The factories have been told to dismantle their production facilities by the end of the month, according to a statement on the website of the Heilongjiang Work Safety Administration.

"We have rescinded their permits for production," the statement said.

The official Xinhua News Agency said three government officials and two factory executives were fired or detained after Monday's blast. It said a preliminary

investigation showed the plant was illegally producing fireworks.

Up to 50 people were working at the fireworks factory in the city of Yichun when it was rocked by an explosion, damaging nearby buildings and sparking secondary blasts.

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, the Xinhua reported.

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.

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