# Johnson Controls: Plant Not Leaking Lead

ELAINE KURTENBACH - AP Business Writer - Associated Press

U.S. battery maker Johnson Controls is at odds with Shanghai's environmental regulator over the credibility of tests the company says show it was not responsible for severe lead poisoning cases in children discovered earlier this year.

The Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based company said Wednesday that an investigation by the China Electric Equipment Industry Association found its battery factory in Shanghai's eastern suburbs was not the cause of elevated blood-lead levels among children in a nearby community. Instead, it pinned blame on a recycling facility in the area.

But Shanghai Environment Bureau official Ju Chunfang, who participated in testing the Johnson Control plant, said the association's investigation is not independent because the company commissioned and paid for it.

He said the bureau began another investigation of its own last week and insisted that Johnson Controls has agreed it is the largest source of lead emissions in the area.

Local officials believe that the plant, which is much larger than other battery factories in the area, had to be the cause of the poisoning cases. In an interview, Ju cited several instances of periodically high emissions tests and prevailing wind patterns as the reason for that allegation.

Xia Qing, the scientist who led the probe cited by Johnson Controls, said it was commissioned by the Electric Equipment Industry Association, and was not paid for by the battery maker.

The tests showed abnormally high lead levels at a waste recycling facility near the community whose children were poisoned, with lead levels three times the current national standard and 10 times a pending stricter national standard. Zinc levels were 15 times national standards.

"I have three conclusions. First, trust the Chinese environmental protection laws. Second, the lead poisonings were not caused by Johnson Controls. And third, pay more attention to the recycling stations and companies," said Xia, an engineer with the China Research Academy of Environmental Science.

The Johnson Controls factory was shut down in September after it reached its annual quota for lead use. The plant has sought repeatedly to get permission to expand production, but local environmental officials say such requests will not be approved due to concerns over lead emissions.

Johnson Controls says it intends to resume production in January as usual.

"We believe this is a comprehensive investigation based on facts," said Alex Molinaroli, president of Johnson Controls Power Solutions. "The results corroborate our own data and prove that emissions from our battery plant could not be the cause of elevated blood-lead levels found in the community."

Johnson Controls had insisted all along that its plant's emission controls and equipment would have prevented any significant contamination.

Production at a second, but smaller battery plant in the area had also been stopped.

Soaring use of cars and electric scooters is driving strong demand for lead acid batteries, and their production and recycling are a key source of lead contamination.

The lead emissions problem drew attention after families living in Kanghua New Village, a small block of apartment buildings erected 15 years ago to house farm families moved to make way for the city's Kangqiao Industrial Zone, said checks showed many of their children had abnormally high blood lead levels.

The village, a small gated community of low-rise apartments, is located just north of the zone and close to chemical, battery and electronics equipment factories.

Johnson Controls earlier said its factory has lead emissions at about one-seventh the Chinese national standard and employees are regularly tested to ensure their blood lead levels remain low enough.

The company is a major supplier to the automotive industry, with 50 manufacturing, recycling and distribution centers supplying more than a third of the world's lead-acid vehicle batteries.

The company is expanding in China, planning a new $100 million plant to make start-stop batteries for vehicles. Such batteries cut fuel use and emissions by automatically shutting off a standard gas-powered engine when it idles and restarting it when the driver engages the clutch or releases the brake.

*Researcher Fu Ting contributed to this report.*

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