

# China Holds Refinery Managers Responsible For Blast

Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Chinese authorities are holding China's largest oil refiner and its top management responsible for a November pipeline explosion that killed 62 people and injured scores of others in the eastern port city of Qingdao.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, decided Friday that an administrative demerit should be recorded against Fu Chengyu, chief of state oil company Sinopec, which operated the pipeline. Fu is one of the most prominent figures in China's oil industry.

The council also agreed to fire Sinopec's chief safety officer and file major administrative demerits against General Manager Wang Tianpu and Deputy General Manager Li Chunguang.

"We firmly abide by the conclusions by the State Council's investigative team on the accident, and we accept the disciplinary actions," Sinopec said in a statement. It apologized to the people of Qingdao and promised to check potential hazards in its pipeline network.

On Thursday, Chinese safety officials said the blast, which also injured 136 people, was caused by sparks from a jackhammer being used to repair a manhole cover following an oil leak. The sparks ignited fumes from the oil that had leaked from a corroded pipe into the city's sewage system, they said.

The safety officials said both municipal officials and Sinopec bore responsibility for failure to carry out routine safety checks, a weak emergency response, poor work procedures, and bad designs that put buildings and the city's underground utility lines too close to the pipeline.

Parts of China's 102,000-kilometer (63,383-mile) network of oil and gas pipelines are 40 years old, and corrosion paired with their intertwining with municipal pipelines puts them at high risk for accidents.

Since the Nov. 22 explosion, inspections have discovered nearly 20,000 potential hazards that are now being dealt with, said Wang Haoshui, an inspector with the administration in charge of safety at petrochemical plants.

On Friday, the Cabinet also endorsed disciplinary actions against 44 other people, including an administrative admonition against the mayor of Qingdao.

It said 15 of the disciplined people have been handed over to the judicial department, where they are likely to be criminally prosecuted.

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The blast was China's second deadliest industrial accident in 2013, behind a chicken factory fire that killed 121 in June in Jilin.

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