Clash At China Smelter After 100s Of Kids Poisoned

Christopher Bodeen, Associated Press Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Villagers in northern China clashed with police outside a lead smelter blamed in the poisoning of more than 600 children, reports said Monday.

Several hundred villagers tore down fences and blocked traffic outside the Dongling Lead and Zinc Smelting Co. in Shaanxi province after news of the poisoning emerged last week, state media and villagers said. Fighting between angry parents and scores of police broke out Sunday, and trucks delivering coal to the plant were stoned.

No immediate word on injuries or arrests was available. Local officials, police and people at the company refused to confirm the reports.

China's breakneck economic development has left much of its soil, air and waterways dangerously polluted, and environmental showdowns with outraged residents are growing. Authorities routinely pledge to close down polluting industries, but often back down because of their importance to the local economy.

At least 615 out of 731 children in two villages near the Dongling smelter have tested positive for lead poisoning, which can damage the nervous and reproductive systems and cause high blood pressure, anemia and memory loss.

Tests have found unusually high lead levels in air surrounding the plant, according to the official Xinhua News Agency, although officials say groundwater, surface water, soil and company waste discharge all meet national standards.

Reports say lead levels in the children were more than 10 times the level considered safe by China.

Families near the factory began bringing sick children to hospitals and clinics in July.

Local officials plan to relocate all 581 households living within 1,600 feet (500 meters) of the factory in the next two years, according to Xinhua.

It was unclear whether the plant had been closed and what its future might be.

Li Li, a resident of Gaozuitou village, located about half a mile (1 kilometer) from the plant, said in a telephone interview that her two daughters began developing blotchy skin, yellowing hair and memory problems as far back as January, but doctors had been unable to explain the cause.

After word broke last week of the lead contamination, Li said she took the girls,

aged nine and 12, in for tests and found their lead levels were as high.

Some people have already sent their children to schools further away, said Li, 36, who said her cabbage and tomato crops have withered as well.

"You can see how bad the pollution is, but we don't have any money. Now, I sleep badly and I can't eat well either," Li said.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/02/2014 - 9:13pm*):
http://www.impomag.com/news/2009/08/clash-china-smelter-after-100s-kids-poisoned?qt-most_popular=0&qt-digital_editions=0