Industrial Runoff Poisons Water For 10,000 In China

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BEIJING (AP) — Some 10,000 residents in a southern China town have been told not to drink tap water after tests showed it was contaminated by a heavy metal, a local official said Wednesday.

Tests showed the amount of manganese in the water supply to some residents of Da'an town in Guangdong province was much higher than the maximum allowed by the government, said a town official who only gave his surname, Wang.

The official Xinhua News Agency said the level of manganese in the water was 12 times higher than the government safety level, which allows 0.1 milligrams per liter (2.1 pints).

Heavy metals are a category of elements often used during industrial processes that can be toxic to human health. Though small amounts of manganese are essential to the body, chronic exposure to large amounts can cause neurological problems, including hallucinations, forgetfulness and nerve damage.

Emergency notices were put out Tuesday in the town, warning residents not to drink tap water until further notice, Xinhua said. "We're trying to remedy the situation and will keep you posted," said one notice.

Environmental pollution in China has increased in recent years as the country's rapid economic development continues virtually unchecked. Industrial disasters are common, with several major incidents in recent weeks, including a massive oil spill off the northeastern coast and a chemical spill when barrels of toxins were swept by floodwaters into the Songhua River.

Local official Wang said the tap water was processed by the Da'an Water Factory, one of the town's two water suppliers. The plant uses the nearby Bao River as its water source. Tap water is usually tested monthly, he said.

"The investigation for the cause of the contamination is still under way," he said.

Local residents have shunned the tap water, heading into the nearby mountains to collect natural spring water, Xinhua said.

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