

# Chinese Authorities Investigate Lead Poisoning Breakout

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SHANGHAI (AP) — Authorities are investigating heavy metals poisoning in a village in eastern China after discovering that dozens of people living near a lead battery plant were sickened.

Local authorities in Deqing, a village near the scenic city of Hangzhou, west of Shanghai, said Monday they ordered that nearly 2,000 people be given free blood tests. Initial results for 317 people found that 31, including 11 children, had lead levels exceeding safety standards.

Some of the children were sent to Shanghai for treatment.

Heavy metals poisoning is an urgent concern in China, where safety standards have often been disregarded by manufacturers and local officials.

Zhejiang Haijiu Battery Co., a major producer of motorcycle batteries, was ordered to suspend operations in Deqing after it discovered late last month that some people living near its factory were suffering from lead poisoning.

Over the weekend, authorities sent a working group to the village to "rectify" the situation, the local government said in a statement.

Experts on heavy metals pollution and poisoning and medical staff were sent to the area to help with the probe, it said.

Aside from the Haijiu battery factory, investigators are checking 26 other heavy metals-related companies operating in Deqing's development zone. Meanwhile, police were keeping Haijiu's management under "control," it said without giving any details.

Staff who answered the phone at Haijiu said their boss was away and would not return for several days, refusing comment.

Although Deqing is close to scenic mountain areas, it also lies within Huzhou, a major production center for the lead-acid batteries used in many vehicles and motorcycles.

China has had hundreds of pollution emergencies in recent years, many involving mass heavy metal contamination. Thousands of children were affected by lead poisoning in several provinces in 2009 and 2010 because they lived near metal smelters or battery factories.

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Lead poisoning can damage the nervous, muscular and reproductive systems. Children are particularly at risk.

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