

China Scoops Up 220,000 Pounds Of Poisoned Fish

Louise Watt, Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Authorities have scooped up around 100,000 kilograms (220,000 pounds) of dead fish they say were poisoned by ammonia from a chemical plant, environmental officials and state media said Wednesday, in a reminder of the pollution plaguing the country.

The Hubei province environmental protection department, notified of the piles of dead fish in central China's Fuhe River on Monday, pointed the finger at local company Hubei Shuanghuan Science and Technology Stock Co. Officials said sampling of its drain outlet showed that ammonia density far exceeded the national standard. The company said it wasn't going to immediately comment.

Inadequate controls on industry and lax enforcement of existing standards have worsened China's pollution problem, stemming from three decades of breakneck economic growth. High-profile incidents this year involving dead animals in rivers — not only deaths attributed to pollution but also carcasses dumped by farmers after die-offs at farms — have added to public disgust and suspicions about the safety of drinking water.

The latest incident has affected the nearby fishing village of Huanghualao, where 1,600 residents make a living from fishing, said the village's Communist Party secretary, Wang Sanqing.

"The dead fish covered the entire river and looked like snowflakes," he said, adding that the village has 150 fishing boats and could lose up to 70,000 yuan (\$11,400) per day.

The environmental department warned the public not to eat the dead fish, but said drinking water was not affected. It said it ordered the company to suspend operations and fix the pollution problem.

The official Xinhua News Agency said about 100,000 kilograms of dead fish had been cleared from 40 kilometers (25 miles) of the river, but did not cite a figure for the number of fish. The environmental department said only that "a great number of fish" had been recovered.

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