

Worker killed in another Chinese factory explosion

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A chemical plant explosion in eastern China has left one worker dead and nine others injured. The blast is the second in the region in the last two weeks, once again highlighting the disregard of the Chinese regime for the safety of workers and residents in surrounding neighborhoods.

The explosion occurred Saturday night in the city of Zibo, in Shandong province, southeast of Beijing. The plant was located just one kilometre from a residential area. Following the massive explosion in Tianjin on August 12, the Chinese government has come under increasing criticism for allowing chemical plants to operate so close to homes.

Saturday's blast appeared to be caused by a fire that ignited flammable chemicals in the plant. Despite the toxic nature of the chemicals, China's Xinhua news agency claimed that there was no contamination in the area of the blast. Homes had their windows blown out and the resulting blaze required 150 fire fighters and 20 fire trucks to extinguish.

The factory opened in July and is owned by Shandong Runxing Chemical Technology Co., a subsidiary of the Shandong Runxing Group. While it produced a number of different chemicals, it primarily made adiponitrile, a chemical used in the production of nylon. Adiponitrile is combustible and gives off a poisonous gas when reacting with fire. Canisters of the chemical reportedly burst after a fire began at the plant.

Many social media users complained of the dangerous living conditions facing residents near such plants. "There are too many chemical plants here, countless," wrote a resident from Zibo. "The air is unbreathable and the water is undrinkable." The comments match similar complaints from those living near chemical plants in other cities.

The explosion in Zibo is also the second to take place

in Shandong province in as many months. The other occurred in Rizhao, a port city, on July 16. Video of the incident shows huge flames at the petrochemical plant and, while no-one was killed, two firefighters were injured fighting the blaze. Chinese state media blamed the fire on a "serious violation of regulations, management disorder and lack of safety awareness."

Both incidents bare stark resemblance to a massive fire that took place at a paraxylene factory in Fujian province in April of this year. The Fujian plant had also only opened recently and experienced a smaller fire after a hydrogen pipeline ruptured when test operations began in July 2013. This was followed by the massive explosion this spring.

Saturday's blast also comes after two, massive explosions on August 12 at a warehouse complex in Tianjin left at least 129 people dead and approximately 700 injured. Forty-four people are still missing, mostly fire fighters. The explosions caused widespread devastation to the world's tenth largest port city and home to approximately 14 million people.

Citizens of Tianjin are deeply concerned about the environmental impact, as well as to their overall health. Dead fish have washed up in a local river, adding to those fears. According to China's state-owned *Global Times*, 33 out of 44 sites tested positive for cyanide in water while six had levels of cyanide between 0.94 and 36.8 times higher than is considered safe.

Many people ridiculed the government when it released photos over the weekend of caged rabbits and chickens placed near the Tianjin blast, supposedly as a method for testing chemical exposure. With anger spilling over, users of China's social media site Weibo left comments such as "Should drag the people responsible over to it." Others lashed out at the use of animals for chemical tests.

The government of President Xi Jinping is well aware that public anger and opposition could grow, compounding that being generated by the declining economy. After the Tianjin accident, Xi called for an investigation of hazardous chemical storage centres, which revealed that 85 out of 124 sites had safety violations. Reports of widespread corruption in the chemical industry also emerged.

Reuters reported on August 23 that between 2009 and 2014, more than 4,000 people were killed in approximately 3,600 hazardous chemical accidents. Zhao Laijun, a professor at Shanghai Jiaotong University and advisor to the Shanghai government on chemical facilities safety, conducted the study.

What is clear from all these incidents is the lack of regard in ruling circles for safety in China's chemical plants and warehouses. Existing safety laws are routinely ignored in the pursuit of greater profits at the expense of the working class. Zhao Laijun told Reuters: "China has clear laws. To maximize economic gain, some firms don't follow the government's laws."

It emerged last week that officials with Rui Hai International Logistics, the company that owned the Tianjin complex, had used its government connections to skirt existing safety laws. The fact that these explosions and fires continue to take place at such an alarming rate is a clear indictment of the Chinese regime as a whole and not merely a few corrupt officials.

The investigation, like all of those that follow a major industrial accident, is meant to placate public anger and scapegoat a few local or company officials. However, the Chinese public is growing increasingly frustrated with these all too common events. In the first six months of this year alone, there were 139,000 industrial accidents that killed 26,000 people.



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