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'Worst Polluted Places' list unveiled

China, India, Russia each have two sites among Top 10 for 2007

MSNBC
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Conservation groups on Wednesday issued their second annual "Worst Polluted Places" list, adding four sites — two in India and one each in Azerbaijan and China — to the top 10.

Overall, the 10 sites lie in seven countries and affect more than 12 million people, according to the Blacksmith Institute and Green Cross Switzerland.

Experts from Johns Hopkins University, [Harvard University](#), MIT, Mount Sinai Hospital and other groups devised the listing criteria, which focused on pollution's impact on human health — especially that of children.

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"The fact of the matter is that children are sick

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and dying in these polluted places, and it's not rock them," Blacksmith director Richard Fuller said in a there has been more focus on pollution in the media, but there has been little action in terms of new funding or programs."

The partners did not try to rank sites, but instead listed them alphabetically. Sites added since the 2006 list are marked with an asterisk:

- Sumgayit, Azerbaijan*;
- Linfen, China;
- Tianying, China*;
- Sukinda, India*;
- Vapi, India*;
- La Oroya, Peru;
- Dzerzhinsk, Russia;
- Norilsk, Russia;
- Chernobyl, Ukraine;

- Kabwe, Zambia.

A report accompanying the list said the scoring methodology was refined "to place more weight on the scale and toxicity of the pollution and on the numbers of people at risk."

It also identified three key factors: mining, [Cold War](#) era pollution and unregulated industries.

The areas were not tourist areas or capitals, rather remote areas where pollution controls don't exist or enforcement is considered weak.

For example, Tianying was cited because of lead poisoning concerns. The city produces half of China's lead, the groups said.

Vapi was described as a region "overwhelmed by industrial estates — more than fifty poison the local soils and groundwater with pesticides, PCBs, chromium, mercury, lead, and cadmium."

"Mercury in Vapi's groundwater (is) 96 times higher" than World Health Organization standards, the report stated.

Sukinda has more than 97 percent of India's chromite ore deposits, the groups added. "Twelve mines operate without environmental controls, leaching hexavalent chromium into drinking water supplies," the report claimed.

Sumgayit, a former Soviet industrial base, is polluting the area with industrial chemicals and heavy metals, the groups said. According to the report, cancer rates there are 22 to 51 percent higher than the national

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average, while genetic mutations and birth defects are commonplace.

The groups also came up with a "Dirty Thirty" list to draw attention to other polluted areas. The majority of those lie in Asia, with China, India, and Russia having the greatest number.

The sites were chosen from a database of more than 400 pollution cases.

Both groups said they have been involved in dozens of pollution cleanups over the last decade.

Report details are online at www.worstpolluted.com.

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