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CIS: Russia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan Cities Among World's Dirtiest

By [Antoine Blua](#)

Russia's chemical manufacturing city of Dzerzhinsk is in the top 10 (file) (TASS)

September 18, 2007 (RFE/RL) -- A recent report puts cities in Russia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan on a list of the 10 most polluted places in the world.

Six other cities in Russia, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan made the "Dirty 30" list by the New York-based **Blacksmith Institute**, an independent environmental group.

The authors of the lists say these sites are putting millions of people at risk.

They say simple engineering projects could make many of the places safe, but that money and political will are often lacking

One of the top 10 is Dzerzhinsk, a significant center of Russian chemical manufacturing for decades, including chemical weapons. According to official figures, almost 300,000 tons of chemical waste were improperly disposed of in and around the western Russian city until 1998.

The Blacksmith institute says drinking water supplies in the city of Nizhny Novgorod and adjoining villages are now heavily contaminated with pollutants because of the pollution at Dzerzhinsk.

Scant Clean-up

The institute's Meredith Block tells RFE/RL that a number of other sites across the former Soviet Union pose similar threats to human health. "These are places where you had a lot of industrial activities but no regulations," she says. "The proper technology had not been implemented at the time these factories were running and since a lot of them have been closed down and operations have ceased there has been little effort made to actually clean up the legacy contamination left over in these sites."

Blacksmith's top 10 list also includes the Siberian city of Norilsk, which hosts the largest heavy-metal smelting complex in the world; Ukraine's Chernobyl nuclear power plant, where the world's worst nuclear disaster took place in 1986; and **Azerbaijan's industrial center of Sumgayit**.

Two cities in both India and China, as well as one each in Peru and Zambia, complete the top 10 list.

The 'Dirty 30'

Another feature of the institute's annual report is the "Dirty 30," a more comprehensive group of polluted locations.

Ust-Kamenogorsk (Ost Kamensk in Russian), the capital of Kazakhstan's East Kazakhstan region, is one of them.

The report says extensive industrial operations for over 50 years under poor environmental standards have led to widespread pollution and hazardous waste deposits.

Zhalipbai Dostai, a professor of geography and an environmental activist in Almaty, tells RFE/RL that air pollution remains at a very high level, although industrial production has been somewhat reduced in Ust-Kamenogorsk in recent

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Perspective

Living With Pollution In Ust-Kamenogorsk

By [Merhat Sharipzhan](#),
director of RFE/RL's *Kazakh Service*

My hometown -- Ust-Kamenogorsk, or Oskemen -- is situated in a very unique place: in the middle of the very picturesque Altai Mountains. It is also near the Russian, Mongolian, and Chinese borders in northeastern Kazakhstan.



The city of some 350,000 was just named by the Blacksmith Institute as one of the "Dirty 30" -- one of the world's 30 most-polluted cities.

For decades, giant industrial facilities producing zinc, lead, titanium, magnesium, and other nonferrous metals have been operating there. In addition, the Ulba Metallurgic Plant has been producing so-called dry fuel for nuclear reactors, working with uranium.

In general, four huge plants in the city were under the direct control and supervision of Moscow during the Soviet-era, even though they were in Kazakhstan.

The ecological situation in the city is far from normal. I remember in my childhood, there were even special warnings on the radio that due to the weather (no wind), all citizens are asked not to open the windows or doors in their apartments in the evening, when the industrial plants were scheduled to get rid of their gaseous wastes by releasing them into the city's air.

In some cases last year, dry leaves in the parks did not rot because, local ecologists explained, all of the bacteria necessary for the leaves to decay were killed by the waste from the industrial plants.

I have not been to my hometown for many years, but my friends and relatives tell me that the current environmental situation is even worse now than it used to be in Soviet times, since less and less attention is paid to the control of the factories' commitment to clean up their waste.

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years.

"Nonferrous metals, ferrous metals, all those industries are concentrated in Ost-Kamensk," he says. "It affects the air, soil, water. The air is contaminated with heavy metals and other sorts of metals. The major problem is the concentration of industrial facilities." In neighboring Kyrgyzstan, the town of Maily-Suu in the Jalal-Abad region was home to a former Soviet uranium-ore mining and processing complex. What remains now are nearly 2 million cubic meters of radioactive mining waste.



A synthetics plant in Sumgayit (Turan)

Maily-Suu's mayor, Bumairam Mamaseyitova tells RFE/RL that the inclusion of her town in the "Dirty 30" list is no surprise. "The installations to clean [uranium waste] were built in 1947," she says. "It makes 60 years up to now. Within these 60 years, there was no single major repair [of the cleaning system]. The same with the [water-inlet system]. It was built 60 years ago. In the [town's] water-inlet system, the water pipes also have not been subject to any major repairs in the past 60 years."

The report says millions of people inhabiting the Ferghana Valley are potentially at risk due to seismic activity in the area.

Some material from the piles of wastes are already being transferred to surrounding areas by runoff, affecting the local population. A 1999 study showed that twice as many residents suffered from some form of cancer in Maily-Suu than in the rest of the country.

Projects supported by the international community and institutions to help Maily-Suu are slated to be completed by 2009. But Kyrgyz officials assert that more funds would be needed to complete the work.

A Matter Of Money, Will

Block says it's not only the responsibility of the countries where the pollution exists to clean up polluted sites. She says the international community has the technology and the engineering expertise to deal with pollution problems.

"Similar problems with these grave consequences [for the health of people] have been dealt with in the United States and in Western Europe in the past 20 or 30 years," she says. "So we have the experience, we know exactly what needs to be done. We just need the money and the political will of the international community."

Kazakh environmental writer Bakhtyar Albani says it's both the polluters' responsibility and the countries where the pollution is occurring to pay more attention to their environment. "All industrial facilities in [Ust-Kamenogorsk] don't pay any attention to the ecology," he says. "Their industrial liquids and gas waste should be controlled properly. The owners of the facilities and plants are reluctant to spend money for that. As a result, we have the situation we have now. The situation is even worse than it was during the Soviet Union."

The "Dirty 30" list includes four other sites in Russia: the western city of Magnitogorsk, the Siberian city of Bratsk, the Far Eastern towns of Dalnegorsk and Rudnaya Pristan, and the Siberian region of Chita.

The Blacksmith Institute says the list is based on scoring criteria devised by an international group of experts and leaders of major international environmental remediation companies.

Sixteen of the "Dirty 30" cities are in either Russia, China, or India.

(RFE/RL's Kazakh and Kyrgyz services contributed to this report)

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