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Industrial Pollution Brings Suffering to 125 Million People: Report Increasing demand of 'developed' countries at root of problem

- Common Dreams staff

One hundred and twenty-five million people around the world suffer from serious health problems that stem from industrial pollution -- a public health crisis on par with malaria or tuberculosis (TB) -- according to a report released this week by the Blacksmith Institute.

The report documents sickness in 49 low and middle income countries with large industrial sectors, including toxin heavy mining sites, tanneries, chemical factories and toxic waste processing sites, and traces the most common industrial pollutants – lead, mercury, chromium, radionuclides and pesticides – in the air, water and soil of the, so called, developing countries.

Those most often sickened by the pollution are children.

The report, while revealing unprecedented amounts of pollution induced sickness, is still an "extremely conservative estimate" according to the report.

"We've investigated 2,600 toxic sites in the last four years, [but] we know there are far more," said Bret Ericson of the Blacksmith Institute.

According to the study, The World's Worst Pollution Problems (pdf), such toxic sites within the countries documented are commonly within a close vicinity to residential areas, a leading factor in the alarming numbers.

"We see a lot of disease when we go into these communities," said Ericson. "But we were surprised the health burden was so high – as much as malaria."

Stephan Robinson, of partner institution Green Cross Switzerland, clarified that a leading factor in the rise of dangerous and unregulated toxic sites in these countries is industrial globalization, especially international mining and resource extraction, and global consumer demand.

"Much of this industrial activity is to serve our needs in the developed world," said Robinson.

"Life-threatening pollution will likely increase as the global economy exerts an ever-increasing pressure on industry to meet growing demands. The damage will be greatest in many low and middle-income countries, where industrial pollution prevention regulations and measures have not kept pace," stated Richard Fuller, President, Blacksmith Institute.

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