

Tuesday, 12 August 2008

Earthquake in China: GC Switzerland and Blacksmith Institute launch a field study in affected areas  
Press release - Zurich, 11 August 2008

### **Dangerous chemicals discharge in the wake of earthquake in China**

On May 12, 2008 a major earthquake measuring 8.0 on the Richter Scale struck the southwest of the People's Republic of China. The quake's epicentre was located in Wenchuan County, Aba Prefecture, around 80 kilometres northwest of Chengdu, the capital of Sichuan Province. Numerous mines and chemical plants are located in this part of China, many of which were damaged or completely destroyed during the quake. There are serious risks to human health and the environment as toxic chemicals may be released into the ground water supply, the air and the soil.

Green Cross Switzerland is joining forces with Blacksmith Institute to launch a field study in the areas of China that were affected by the quake. A database for information on the discharge of chemical contaminants will be set up as a first step. Based on that, contaminated locations can be identified and contaminant risks assessed. Until July 2009 remedial actions matching the type of contaminant and pollution levels will be developed for the areas of China damaged by the quake.

### **Discharge of ammonia, phosphorus, heavy metals and POPs**

Initial investigations have shown that the earthquake caused a series of incidents involving discharge of chemicals. The city of Shi Fang, which before the earthquake was home to a number of chemicals manufacturers, was particularly affected. Some cases reported in this city highlight the potential risks. Liquid ammonia from Ying Feng Industrial Co., Ltd leaked into a nearby river. Liquid ammonia was also detected at the Kai Ge meat factory and at SiChuan MeiFeng Chemical Industrial Co., Ltd. In addition, the collapse of the factory building of FengLin Chemical Industrial Co. Ltd. led to phosphorus burning. The earthquake also caused enormous damage in mining areas (Sichuan, Shanxi and Gansu). According to government reports, the collapse of mines triggered the release of heavy metals and persistent organic pollutants (POPs) contaminating nearby bodies of water and growing areas.

It is assumed that most contaminants released as a result of the earthquake will move through soil layers and into groundwater supplies. Potential risks of heavy metals contamination and chemical toxins must be taken into consideration during reconstruction efforts.

Green Cross Switzerland facilitates overcoming consequential damages caused by industrial and military disasters and by contaminated sites from the period of the Cold War. Central issues are the improvement of the living quality of people affected by chemical, radioactive and other types of contamination, as well as the promotion of a sustainable development in the spirit of co-operation instead of confrontation. The objectives of Green Cross Switzerland are supported by the Green Cross Parliamentary Group (headed by National Council Christa Markwalder Bär). This multi-party group is made up of 30 members of the States Council and 86 members of the National Council. The ZEWO-certified environmental organization is internationally recognized for professional action. Green Cross International with headquarters in Geneva was founded by the former President of the

Soviet Union, Mikhail Gorbachev, in 1993. The organization is composed of a network of 30 affiliate organizations, which work to support peace and security as well as solve problems of poverty and the environment.

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