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Pollution as harmful as malaria, TB in developing world

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Pollution from factories and mines is putting the health of 125 million people at risk worldwide and is as dangerous in the developing world as malaria or tuberculosis, according to a report published on Tuesday by two environmental advocacy groups. The researchers behind the '2012 World's Worst Pollution Problems' report say theirs is the first substantial attempt to estimate the number of people sickened or killed worldwide because they work in or live near tanneries, recycling plants, chemical

factories or mines, among other toxic industries. "Appropriately, large amounts of time and resources are devoted to addressing the burden of diseases like tuberculosis and malaria," said Stephan Robinson, a researcher at Green Cross Switzerland, which produced the report with the Blacksmith Group, a New York-based non-profit environmental organisation. "The striking fact is that international and local government action on these diseases greatly outpaces the attention given to toxic sites, which as demonstrated in this report, contribute greatly to the global burden of disease," he said. Researchers examined more than 2,900 active or shuttered industrial sites in 49 low – and middle-income countries and estimated the health impact of pollutants – such as lead, mercury or chromium – on the people who live nearby or work at the sites, often producing goods or providing services for people in richer countries. The advocacy groups noted that their numbers "are by no means conclusive, but can be taken as indicative of the potential scale of the problem," adding that they expected the figures to be underestimates of the full scale of the problems. Researchers analysed data from their own field studies at toxic sites and combined that with census data as well as epidemiological studies to extrapolate an estimate of the health problems involved. The report cautioned that in many cases the data were "very limited." Smaller companies, often producing for local markets, tended to have the biggest negative health impact. No specific companies were named in the report. – Reuters



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