

[60-Second Earth](#) - October 29, 2009

Can the World's Most Polluted Places Ever Be Cleaned?

From phasing out leaded gasoline to minimizing mercury poisoning, the answer appears to be yes. Christie Nicholson reports, with research, reporting and writing by David Biello

From Chernobyl to La Oroya, Peru, the world is littered with toxic wastelands, the residue of human industry. For the past two years, the Blacksmith Institute, an environmental health organization based in New York City, has been cataloguing the world's worst pollution problems. But with 40 cleanup projects in 19 countries, Blacksmith also knows that toxic pollution can be among the easiest problems to solve.

This week a new report by Blacksmith and Green Cross Switzerland highlights the best cleanup examples. First among equals: the global phase out of leaded gasoline, which has helped bring down blood levels of this potent neurotoxic in children. As of this year only 11 countries still use leaded gasoline.

Here are some other top successes: destroying stockpiles of chemical weapons globally as well as local stores of DDT in Tanzania; new cooking stoves to eliminate indoor air pollution in Ghana; separating copper mine tailings from the local water supply in Chile; alternative fuels to reduce air pollution in New Delhi as well as treating arsenic in well water in West Bengal; removing lead-contaminated soil in the Dominican Republic and Russia; reducing mercury vapors from artisanal gold mining in Indonesia; and new sewage systems to clean up contaminated Suzhou Creek in Shanghai.

Even the lingering radioactivity from Chernobyl, the world's worst nuclear power accident, can be mitigated. The introduction of a new containment structure around the meltdown as well as group therapies for the children can reduce radiation exposure by as much as 80 percent.

This is all grounds for hope even in the world's most polluted places.

—David Biello & Christie Nicholson

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