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Ten Most Polluted Places Named



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September 18, 2007—Two girls walk to school amid smoky skies in La Oroya, Peru, in this September 2003 photo. (See a map of Peru.) The congested mining town of 35,000 nestled high in the Andes was recently added to the Blacksmith Institute's list of the ten most polluted places in the world.

A metal smelter run by the Missouri-based Doe Run Corporation has operated in the remote settlement since 1922.

Exposure to the smelter's pollution has led to dangerously high blood lead levels in nearly all of La Oroya's children, according to the New York-based institute.

Lung ailments are widespread, and high numbers of premature death have been linked to the smelter's emissions, the nonprofit reports on its Web site.

Likewise, acid rain from sulfur dioxide pollution has destroyed much of the vegetation in the area.

Doe Run says it has invested approximately 1 million U.S. dollars a year in a joint program with the Peruvian Ministry of Health to lower blood lead levels in the region.

The Blacksmith Institute, which collaborates with local agencies to fight pollution worldwide, compiled its annual list of the most polluted places through a nomination process.

The entries were then reviewed by a technical advisory board of medical and environmental experts.

William Suk, acting deputy director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences, was not involved in the report.

"What the [Blacksmith Institute] has done is a good thing," Suk told National Geographic News.

"They are trying to bring to the attention of the world that these sites exist."


Keep clicking to see the other locations named on this year's list: Sungrayit, Azerbaijan; Linfen, China; Sukinda, India; Vapin, India; La Oroya, Peru; Dzerzhinsk, Russia; Noril'sk,

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Russia; Chernobyl, Ukraine; Kabwe, Russia; (Tianying, China, is not pictured.)

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—*Photograph by AP*

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Russia's northernmost major city, Noril'sk pumps out more than two million tons of pollutants a year—making it one of the ten most polluted spots in the world, according to the New York-based nonprofit Blacksmith Institute. (See a map of Russia.)

Mining and smelting began in Noril'sk in the 1930s, and the city now houses the world's largest smelting complex for heavy metals.

Snow is often blackened with pollution, the air tastes of sulfur, and the life expectancy is up to ten years lower than the Russian average, the institute reported.

Noril'sk Nickel, the major firm operating in the town, says it has invested millions in its dust and gas recovery and removal systems, according to the institute.

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—Photograph by Randy Olson/NGS

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Cars inch through the smog-filled city center of Linfen, China, on July 7, 2007. (See a map of China.) The city is listed among the world's ten most polluted places of 2007, according to the New York-based nonprofit Blacksmith Institute.

Linfen sits at the center of China's prodigious coal industry, which is largely unregulated by the government. Residents describe choking on coal dust, and local health clinics have reported an upsurge in bronchitis, pneumonia, and lung cancer, according to the institute.

"The one thing that blew me away was in Linfen, three million people are affected by air pollution," said William Suk, acting deputy director of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences.

"People assume a lot of these sites are in the middle of nowhere, but they're not."

By the end of 2007, Linfen plans to shut down 57 of its 153 coal-producing plants, to be replaced with cleaner, regulated facilities, the institute's Web site reported.

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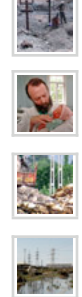


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Women work at an open chromite mine at Sukinda, in the eastern [Indian](#) state of Orissa, in this undated photo. (See [a map of India](#).) The Sukinda valley contains 97 percent of the country's deposits of chromite—a source of chromium—and is the site of one of the largest open-cast chromite ore mines in the world.

A list issued by the nonprofit Blacksmith Institute cites the region as one of the most polluted in the world.

Twelve mines operate in Sukinda, generating about 30 million tons of waste rock and contaminating more than 60 percent of the water resources with hexavalent chromium, a known carcinogen, the institute said on its Web site.

A state government study has also indicated that 85 percent of the deaths in the mining areas and nearby villages are due to chromite-mine related diseases.

The government reportedly stated that the situation in Sukinda "is unique, it is gigantic, and it is beyond the means and purview of the [Orissa Pollution Control] Board to solve the problem."

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A cemetery of radioactive vehicles is seen near the [Ukraine's Chernobyl nuclear power plant](#) in this November 10, 2000 photo. (See a [map of Ukraine](#).) More than 1,300 Soviet military helicopters, buses, bulldozers, and other equipment were used—and contaminated—while responding to the April 26, 1986 nuclear accident at Chernobyl.

The disaster's residual effects and its potential for future environmental and health damage has landed Chernobyl on the New York-based Blacksmith Institute's 2007 list of the ten most polluted sites.

A hundred times more radiation was released during the meltdown of Chernobyl's reactor than was contained in the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The event created a spike in thyroid cancers among children and led to innumerable respiratory ailments, infertility cases, and birth defects in local residents.

Today a 19-mile (31-kilometer) exclusion zone around the reactor remains largely deserted.

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—Photograph by EfreM Lukatsky/AP

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Men search for metal at an abandoned lead mine in Kabwe, Zambia, the country's second largest city, in this undated photo. (See a map of Zambia.)

Decades of unregulated lead mining have led to widespread poisoning in residents exposed to soil and water.

The New York-based Blacksmith Institute added the city to its list of the ten most polluted places for 2007.

Blood lead levels in children, who often bathe in contaminated water and play in the soil, are high enough to be potentially fatal, the institute reported on its Web site.

Although a local nonprofit educates families about avoiding lead exposure, entire communities may have to relocate, the institute said.

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—Photograph by Blacksmith Institute

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A doctor holds a newborn in Dzerzhinsk, [Russia](#), in 1997. (See a [map of Russia](#).)

The city, once the country's Cold War headquarters for producing chemical weapons, was recently added to the Blacksmith Institute's list of the world's ten most polluted places.

Dzerzhinsk remains an important hub of chemical manufacturing.

Babies born here have birth defects at three times the national rate, the institute said on its Web site. A quarter of these babies will likely grow up and work in factories that still spew toxic chemicals, it added.

Dzerzhinsk's average life expectancy is 42 years for men, well below the national average of about 58.

No major initiative to combat the pollution and health problems is underway, according to the New York-based institute.

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Workers dump waste at Vapi, a town in western India that marks the southern end of the country's "Golden Corridor"—a 400-kilometer (245-mile) stretch of industrial sites that manufacture petrochemicals, pesticides, dyes, paints, and fertilizers. (See a [map of India](#).)

A survey by the Indian government revealed that the sites lack a proper system for disposing of industrial waste, which often contains high levels of heavy metals and cyanide, among other contaminants.

A new list issued by the nonprofit Blacksmith Institute places Vapi in the top ten of the most polluted regions in the world.

Vapi's distance from sources of clean water has forced residents to consume the town's contaminated water, the institute said.

As a result, incidences of respiratory diseases, carcinoma, skin and throat cancers, birth defects, and infertility are high in Vapi, the nonprofit added.




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Untreated sewage and mercury-contaminated sludge flow into a water system at Sumgayit, Azerbaijan, in this undated photo. (See a map of Azerbaijan.)

A major industrial center of the former Soviet Union and erstwhile home to more than 40 chemical factories, Sumgayit was recently named one of the ten most polluted cities in the world by the nonprofit Blacksmith Institute.

At their peak of production, the town's factories released as much as 120,000 tons of harmful emissions annually, exposing workers and residents to high levels of contaminants, the institute said.

A study conducted by the Azerbaijani government and the UN revealed that cancer rates in Sumgayit are 22 to 51 percent higher than in rest of the country.

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—Photograph by Petros Morgos/Blacksmith Institute

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