

Shanghai families say kids poisoned by lead

September 15 2011, By ELAINE KURTENBACH , AP Business Writer

(AP) -- Families living in one of Shanghai's many industrial suburbs say their children are suffering from lead poisoning from nearby factories and recycling facilities.

Officials did not respond to calls Thursday requesting comment after families in Kanghua New Village complained that recent checks showed many of their children were suffering from [blood lead](#) levels up to nearly nine times the legal limit.

The soaring use of cars and electric scooters, two of the most sought-after accouterments of affluence in China, is driving strong demand for lead acid batteries. But the production and recycling of those batteries and of other electronics components poses a growing [environmental threat](#) at a time when government leaders are striving to deliver more sustainable, people-oriented economic growth.

Residents say Kanghua New Village, compact community of modest but modern apartment blocks, was built about 15 years ago to house families moved off farmland to make way for the Kangqiao Industrial Zone.

The source of the lead contamination was not immediately clear, but the village is located just north of the factory zone, amid corn and vegetable fields and older rural housing, and beside chemical, battery and electronics equipment factories.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin-based Johnson Controls Inc. which operates a battery factory nearby, said it was aware of residents' concerns about

lead exposure.

"We acknowledge and take these concerns very seriously. We are working with the government to understand and address these issues. However, we have no reason to believe we are the source of the issue," the company said in an emailed statement.

Johnson Controls' battery plant was named a "national model enterprise for occupational health and safety" in 2006, it said. The factory has lead emissions at about one-seventh the Chinese national standard and employees are regularly tested to ensure their blood [lead levels](#) remain low enough, the company said.

On Wednesday evening, residents gathered in the village courtyard and playground were eager to show visitors their children's lab reports, showing blood lead levels of 500 micrograms per liter and higher. The legal limit for children is 100 micrograms per liter; none of those tested had levels below 200 micrograms per liter, and most were in the 300-400 micrograms per liter range.

Those results differed from a batch of identical tests done just a week later that showed no abnormalities - leading some residents to suspect that the second round of tests showing normal results were falsified.

"All the earlier reports were very high and the later reports were under the limit. We don't trust the hospital at all," said one resident, who asked only to be identified by her surname, Cai, because of fears of reprisals.

"They should never have built the village right here by the factories. There are battery and recycling factories all around," she said.

Lead poisoning can damage the nervous, muscular and reproductive systems, and children are particularly at risk.

Decades of allowing manufacturers to disregard safety standards, and of heavy reliance on coal, has left much of the country contaminated by toxic metals and chemicals.

Earlier this year, China began cracking down on emissions of [lead](#) and other heavy metals following a spate of poisoning cases, mostly in rural areas near factories. Reports of clusters of cases in big cities like Shanghai are uncommon.

Shanghai has moved much of its heavy industry to its sprawling suburbs, but the city of 23 million is so heavily populated that residential areas are still relatively close to factories.

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