



Green Beagle



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## PRESS RELEASE

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### **Environmental NGOs act together against heavy metal pollution**

Dai Village in Leping City (Jiangxi Province) is a case study for soil pollution in China. Asia's largest copper mine is located upstream and is the primary source of pollution. However, Dai Village also has a serious water pollution problem and the quality of tap water in this village is a major concern, according to surveys by environmental NGOs such as Tianjin-based Lving (it literally means "green leadership"), Green Beagle (GB) and the Center of Environmental Communication of Youth Jiangxi (CECY). Shortly after the end of the survey, the organizations jointly wrote an open letter to the local government to call for improvements in the quality of tap water in Dai Village. "This is part of our environmental assistance - to seek social resources so as to address the environmental challenges facing local villagers," said Pan Qing'an, a participant in the surveys. The environmental assistance to pollution victims is part of the EU-funded project "Strengthening the capacity of pollution victims and civil society organizations to increase chemical safety in China" (1).

#### **People in Dai Village are in urgent need of assistance in access to clean drinking water**

Zhu Qing, the head of the China Center for Water Safety Monitoring (CCWSM), conducted independent measurements of tap water and surface water in Dai Village. The CCWSM found that the quality of water from a small river near Guanzhuang Village, which is the water source of Dai Village, was at Level 4, suggesting that this river is not qualified to be a source of drinking water. In addition, there was excessive visible matter in the tap water for daily use, plus excessive nitrates in water from local wells. The CCWSM was unable to measure more indicators due to limited measurement resources, but is now seeking a partner that is willing to provide Dai Village with water quality measurement services.

The current drinking water in Dai Village has been provided by Xingfu Waterworks since December 2013 – after years of appeal from the community. Before this, villagers typically drank deep groundwater with potential quality problems, after drinking water from wells polluted by wastewater discharged by the above-mentioned copper mine. Unfortunately, the above mentioned survey by Lving, GB and CECY has raised concerns that Xingfu Waterworks appears to be obtaining water from polluted sources. Guanzhuang Village is less than 5,000 meters from the river where Xingfu Waterworks gets raw water. Garbage from this village is permanently piled along this river, where villagers wash clothing. In addition, there are large areas of farmland along this river, into which pesticides and chemical fertilizers flow during farming seasons.

- MORE FOLLOWS -

## **The local government should arrange free physical checkup for the affected villagers**

Dai Village is surrounded by the Le'An River on three sides. Local villagers never thought that this river, along which they had lived in peace and contentment for generations would someday bring them endless harms as a result of a copper mine. Over 20 kilometers up the Le'An River lies the Dexing Copper Mine, Asia's largest open-pit copper mine. The Dexing Copper Mine sees a year-by-year increase in production since it was put into operation in 1965, together with increasing pollution by wastewater from ore dressing to the Le'An River. Water from wells in this village has long become toxic as a result of the polluted Le'An River. The contents of iron and manganese in local groundwater are 7.4 and 18.8 times as high as Level 3 defined in the Groundwater Quality Standard on the basis of human health indicators, according to measurements from an environmental monitoring organization.

Some villagers were suffering from strange diseases back in the 1980s, when four or five young people died from gullet cancer per year. Although polluted wells have been left unused for years, villager health remains a major concern. In 2009, the Dexing Copper Mine worked with the Dai Village Committee to provide villagers other than old ones with hair testing services, before receiving worrisome measurements.

A large number of residents in Dai Village have skin diseases because of unavoidable exposure to water from the Le'An River, according to a survey by an environmental organization. A lead-zinc mine, which, like the Dexing Copper Mine, is owned by the Jiangxi Copper Corporation (JCC), is located near Wuxing Village, which is not far from Dai Village. Some children in Wuxing Village were found to have unacceptably high blood lead levels (BLL). However, generally it is difficult for community residents to obtain BLL measurements for their children – a vital information source to protect from the permanent damage caused by lead

Zhang Wenbin, a member of the CECY, also participated in the above-mentioned surveys. He said that the affected villagers are in urgent need of free, comprehensive physical checkup, for which the involved companies and governments should pay, and that they should both compensate these villagers depending on checkup results.

## **It is necessary to rehabilitate the land that became toxic decades ago**

It is known to all in Dai Village that the land along the Le'An River and on its islands has long been severely polluted by heavy metals. These are the same pieces of land that would become fertile after they were flooded, leading to tasty rice. But that was decades ago before the Dexing Copper Mine began operating. These pieces of land have become increasingly barren since the Le'An River was polluted by wastewater from the copper mine. And this has become a permanent pain in Dai Village!

Dai Bingliang, a resident in Dai Village, worked with members of some environmental NGOs to take samples for measurement from farmland over 133 hectares in area in late 2013 and last June. The resulting measurements show that the contents of copper, lead, zinc, arsenic and other heavy metals in the soil samples are 20-100 times higher than Chinese regulatory limits defined in the Environmental Quality Standard for Soils (GB15618-1995).

Residents in Dai Village have yet to receive the government-promised compensation for 190.67 hectares of farmland that has been left unused for nearly three decades. The Jiangxi Provincial Government has long identified Dai Village as a pilot area for soil rehabilitation and has therefore heavily invested in this village at a time when the state pays increasing attention to soil pollution caused by heavy metals. However, information about contaminants in soil is lacking and community residents cannot access the information which exists.

- MORE FOLLOWS --

Pan Qing'an, Green Beagle, said that they would apply for information transparency and take action to ensure compliance with Chinese law and in order to call for accountability for soil rehabilitation and compensation for local villagers in Dai Village. Liu Jinmei, a lawyer at the Center for Legal Assistance to Pollution Victims (CLAPV) noted the importance of legal proceedings. "In difficult cases like Dai Village, it is extremely important for the legal system to uphold compliance with Chinese law."



GB staff Pan Qingan is testing the contaminated soil using a hand-held XRF device.



Surface water and drinking water quality is still a big problem for Dai Villagers.



Some serious skin diseases are observed among Dai villagers, possibly incurred by water pollution.



Dai villagers have to store large amounts of bottled water to avoid health risks.

## Footnotes

(1) Strengthening the capacity of pollution victims and civil society organizations to increase chemical safety in China is an EU-funded project of IPEN with partners Arnika – Toxics and Waste Programme and Green Beagle that aims to strengthen the capacity of civil society organizations and communities impacted by pollution to increase chemical safety in China. The Project (also known as the China Chemical Safety Project) is being implemented in China over two years with the EU contribution.

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