

Press Release 01 12 09

New Report: Bhopal Children Poisoned by Toxic Water Supply

Thousands of people in Bhopal, India, are being poisoned by toxic chemicals leaching into their water supply from the abandoned Union Carbide pesticide plant.

The site of the World's worst ever industrial accident – the 1984 gas leak, has never been cleaned up, and years of monsoon rains have washed its abandoned stockpiles of toxic chemicals in to the soil and groundwater aquifer that is still used by many as a source of drinking water.

Analysis carried out by accredited laboratories in Switzerland and the UK found at least sixteen contaminants at levels greatly exceeding World Health Organisation (WHO) safe guideline levels. Carbon Tetrachloride toxicity was recorded at more than 1200 times the WHO safe guidance level. This is a chemical that was banned in consumer products in the US as long ago as 1970.

Worse still, concentrations of some of the chemicals are still rising. One reading showed that Carbon Tetrachloride toxicity had risen by 270% between May 2008 and June 2009.

Many of the chemicals found in the water supply are known, or suspected, carcinogens. They have potential neurotoxin properties and can cause damage to the body's organs. Many are especially harmful to children and fetuses.

The impact of people living in the area is shocking. It has been called Bhopal's 'second disaster', as a new generation, not even born at the time of the 1984 gas leak, have been exposed to decades of poisoning.

These toxic chemicals and heavy metals are in the soil, in the plants and animals, and even in the breast milk of nursing mothers. In the affected areas people are chronically sick; cancer rates are rising and children are born with terrible abnormalities. A preliminary study suggests as many as one child in twenty-five is born with a congenital defect.

The report concludes that the toxic chemicals in the water supply were those used at the UCIL plant in the production processes of the pesticide Sevin, and that there is no other possible source for the contamination. Dow Chemical, the American company who bought Union Carbide in 2001, has never been held to account for the clean up.

Significantly, the report completely counteracts the recent statements made by Bhopal Gas Tragedy Relief and Rehabilitation Minister Babulal Gaur, when he said: "The plant is being opened to help people get rid of the apprehension and misconception that the chemical wastes lying in the factory are still harmful and are polluting the ground water of the nearby localities."

Jon Snow, broadcaster, and Patron of The Bhopal Medical Appeal, said of this year's Anniversary: "That's 25 years of evasion and denial from the parties responsible for this appalling crime. 25 years of struggle for justice on the part of the survivors."

Peter Finnigan, Executive Secretary at The Bhopal Medical Appeal, said:

“We hope that the combined authority of our tests, along with the findings of others taken over the last decade will dispel any notion of the site being ‘safe’ once and for all.”

The Bhopal Medical Appeal Report was compiled using new, previously un-published test data, from accredited laboratories in Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, alongside the collated results of previous tests carried out by: Greenpeace; NEERI; and SHRISTI.

The Bhopal Medical Appeal is a UK charity, Reg. No. 1117526, that funds The Sambhavna Trust Clinic in Bhopal, India. Sambhavna is the only place that offers free treatment to sufferers of both the 1984 chemical gas disaster and the present day water poisoning. For more information, or to make a donation please visit our website at www.bhopal.org

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Notes to editors

1 The Report

Title: Analysis of Chemical Contaminants in Ground Water of Communities Surrounding UCIL Plant Site in Bhopal India.

Report & Executive Summary available at <http://www.bhopal.org>

2 1984 Union Carbide Gas Leak Disaster

For more information www.bhopal.org

3 The Bhopal Medical Appeal

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For more information www.bhopal.org

4 For photos please go to:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/44868727@N02/sets/72157622862334748/>

5 For videos please go to:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/BhopalMedicalAppeal>

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