



Rumors of pollution quashed

Zheng Jinran and Lan Lan

606 words

14 August 2015

[China Daily-US Edition](#)

CDUSDE

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English

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Chemical concentrations in the air 'within safe levels'

Tianjin and Beijing have denied rumors that severe air pollution resulted from Wednesday's explosions in Tianjin's Binhai New Area, saying the accident has not affected the capital and that excessive harmful pollutants in Tianjin have been dispersed.

Rumors that spread online claimed the explosions at warehouses storing chemical products generated poisonous air pollutants.

Wen Wurui, head of the Tianjin Environmental Protection Bureau, said at a news conference on Thursday that the pungent smells were from toluene, chloroform and ethylene oxide, all major industrial chemicals, but that the harmful air pollutants released from the blasts have been dispersed or have dropped to within national safety standards.

The concentration of toluene in the air peaked at about 5:30 am, reaching 3.7 milligrams per cubic meter, higher than the national standard of 2.4 milligrams per cubic meter. Meanwhile, the concentration of "volatile organic compounds" was 5.7 milligrams per cubic meter, also exceeding the Tianjin municipal standards of 2 milligrams per cubic meter.

Chloroform and ethylene oxide - other pollutants - were also detected after the blasts. But their presence in the air has gradually fallen, Wu said. The toluene level dropped to within national standards by 8 am on Thursday, while the VOCs met the standards by 10 am and harmful chloroform and ethylene oxide could not be detected by 1 pm.

The other six air pollutants that are regularly monitored, including sulfur dioxide, PM2.5 and PM10, have been at usual levels, the Tianjin municipal government said.

Detailed explanations for the devastating explosions have not been released, as the Tianjin government is continuing to investigate.

The municipal environmental watchdog has set up 22 monitoring stations, of which five are checking water quality.

The drainage outlet to the Bohai Sea has been closed, and the bureau is conducting an investigation into water quality.

The blasts have had a limited effect on Tianjin's air quality because the wind has been blowing the air to the Bohai Sea, the local meteorological station said, adding that the breeze may disperse the pollutants slowly.

In Beijing, about 150 km northwest of Tianjin, the municipal government disputed rumors on Thursday morning that the explosions would adversely affect air quality in the capital.

Winds from the southwest and west that the capital is currently experiencing are also keeping the city clear of harmful pollutants, the Beijing Environmental Protection Bureau said.

The capital's monitoring stations in the southeastern region have not detected anything unusual in the air quality nor any sudden rise of air pollutants.

One of the warehouses was built for storing sodium cyanide and toluene diisocyanate, two highly toxic chemical compounds, according to an environmental testing report posted on the website of the local environmental monitoring station.

Cheng Qian, [Greenpeace's](#) toxics assistant campaign manager in Beijing, said that if the cause was sodium cyanide, the air quality index in Tianjin won't reflect its density because the material isn't included in the air quality monitoring system.

Ma Jun, director of the Institute for Public and Environmental Affairs, said, "After the blast, the public should be informed of any possible hazardous emissions in the air as soon as there is a result."

In 2013, the site passed its environmental assessment, which was conducted by the Tianjin Academy of Environmental Sciences. The academy declined to comment on Thursday.

"The project under construction involves hazardous and inflammable material, and there are certain environmental risks in transportation and storage," the environmental assessment report said.

Contact the writer at zhengjinran@chinadaily.com.cn

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