

Global pollution-fighters find scant success

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By Burton Frierson

NEW YORK (Reuters) - Twelve of the worst pollution problems in the developing world are being cleaned up, demonstrating that tens of thousands of others also could be improved, according to a report released on Wednesday.

The clean-up sites, ranging from Ukraine's Chernobyl nuclear disaster area to the polluted streets of Delhi, were in the fourth annual World's Worst Polluted Places Report issued by the New York-based Blacksmith Institute and Green Cross Switzerland.

In contrast to previous years' reports, which highlighted contaminated sites or specific pollution problems, the 2009 edition focused on clean-ups and solutions.

"Tens of thousands of polluted sites contaminate local populations -- as many as 500 million people are poisoned each day in the developing world," the report said.

"Only a few of these problems have been fixed. But it's a start and worth recognizing."

The group's initial search for potential success stories yielded just 45 candidates. Making the final list were the only 12 cases that appeared to provide verifiable and credible evidence of success.

"Here we are talking about successes but there's only 12 of them," Richard Fuller, president of Blacksmith Institute, told a teleconference of journalists.

"We've spent hundreds of billions of dollars in the West cleaning up our pollution problems here and at the same time we've shifted all our industry overseas and what we've done is ended up poisoning all these people in all these places overseas."

Blacksmith, an international not-for-profit organization, noted global progress in areas that were not geographically specific: removing lead from gasoline, which causes neurological damage, and efforts to eliminate through international treaty obsolete chemical weapons that maim and kill.

The report also listed 10 sites and what has been done to clean them up:

* Accra, Ghana: the broad commercialization of cooking stoves that reduce indoor air pollution, which causes respiratory illnesses in women and children;

* Candelaria, Chile: disposal of copper tailings and water treatment;

* Chernobyl-affected areas, Eastern Europe: medical, psychological and educational interventions to improve the lives of people in the zone of radiation contamination;

* Delhi: reduction of vehicle emissions that cause urban air pollution;

* Haina, Dominican Republic: removal of soil contaminated by the improper recycling of used car batteries, reducing lead levels in children's blood;

* Kalimantan, Indonesia: reduction of mercury poisoning from gold mining;

* Old Korogwe, Tanzania: removal of a stockpile of pesticides responsible for

contaminating soil and a river;

* Rudnaya Pristan Region, Russia: removal of lead-contaminated soil in children's playgrounds;

* Shanghai: 12-year program to clean up sewage in an urban waterway that supplies drinking water to millions;

* West Bengal, India: reduction in arsenic poisoning through removal of naturally occurring arsenic in well water.

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