

Tianjin Explosions: Chinese Authorities To Conduct Indepth Investigation, Police Arrests

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The State Council established a task force on August 18 to probe into the massive warehouse explosions that rocked Tianjin's Binhai New Area last Wednesday.

The team, which includes members of the Tianjin government and other related departments, is investigating the cause of the explosions in accordance with laws and regulations.

The investigators will define the nature and gravity of the incident, determine liability and also advise on punishment. A statement issued by the State Council on August 18 said the team will "give a responsible answer" to the Party and the people, and that those found to be responsible will be severely punished.

Ten people with connections to the company that owned the warehouse have been taken into custody on August 13, according to the officials from the Tianjin police bureau.

Yu Xuewei and Dong Shexuan, directors of Ruihai International Logistics, were among the senior managers and shareholders taken in for questioning.

A total 114 deaths have been reported, 101 of which have been identified, while 65 people remain missing as of 9:00 am on August 19. Those missing include five firefighters in active service, 44 firefighters working for the Tianjin Port Group Co, and five policemen.

Efforts to identify victims with DNA tests are ongoing, and related departments will continue to release updated information, officials said.

Bao Jingling, chief engineer of the Tianjin Environmental Protection Bureau, responded to queries on the white foam that appeared on streets following rains in Tianjin at the press conference on August 19, saying that nothing abnormal was detected in samples tested by the environmental watchdog.

Photos circulating online show large amounts of white foam on streets after the rain, while some on social media reported discomforted after getting wet from the brief rains on the morning of August 18 in Tianjin's Binhai New Area.

Zong Guoying, Party secretary of Binhai New Area, said the government has set up a special services center to deal with repairs of damaged residential areas. The center also is supplementing affected residents with temporary housing costs and processing compensation claims.

Afterwards, the government will hire a third party to assess damages and compensate according to related laws.

Zong also noted that after the investigation, the government will provide a clear, just and transparent report to the public, addressing issues such as proximity of the exploded warehouse containing hazardous chemicals and residential districts.

The blast revealed that serious work safety loopholes exist in China's chemical industry. The whole industry should learn from the fatal blasts. Now local governments in China are carrying out inspections of companies engaged in the processing, storage and transportation of dangerous chemicals.

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