

Floods wash chemical barrels into China river

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Barrels from a chemical plant float in the Songhua river in Jilin, northeast China's Jilin province on July 28, 2010. Floodwaters have washed 3,000 barrels of explosive chemicals into a major waterway in northeastern China, state media has said, much more than originally reported.

Floodwaters have washed 3,000 barrels of explosive chemicals into a major waterway in northeastern China, state media said Thursday, much more than originally reported.

Water supplies to the nearby city of Jilin were cut after the incident, leaving 4.3 million people dependent on bottled water, but the local government said the move was unrelated and caused by an electricity maintenance project.

The chemicals were among 7,000 barrels washed into the Songhua River

in Jilin province on Wednesday after days of heavy rain, the official Xinhua news agency reported, citing the local government.

The barrels came from the Xinyaqiang [chemical](#) plant near the city and contained more than 510 tonnes of combustible chemicals, reports said.

Xinhua has said the chemical was methyl chloride, a highly explosive colourless gas. It said Thursday that 7,000 barrels were swept into the river, with 3,000 barrels containing the chemical while the rest were empty.

A report Wednesday had said some barrels contained trimethyl chloro silicane, a pungent, flammable liquid that gives off hydrochloric acid when it reacts with water.

More than 200 workers were trying to recover the barrels and had retrieved 400 so far, reports said.

Jilin is the latest province to be hit by deadly floods that have killed 333 people since July 14 and left another 300 missing, according to the latest official figures.

Local environmental protection authorities monitoring the [water quality](#) of the Songhua river have so far detected no contamination, the China Daily said.

Despite assurances that local water was safe to drink, authorities cut the supply to the city of 4.3 million on Wednesday, the newspaper said, triggering a run on bottled water.

In 2005, millions of people in northeastern Heilongjiang province were left without [water](#) for four days after an explosion at a benzene factory spilled the carcinogenic chemical into the Songhua River.

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