

Inhaling 'Red Mud Disaster' dust may not be as harmful to health as feared

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Red mud produced by the recent industrial accident in Hungary may not be as harmful to health as feared. Credit: American Chemical Society

Scientists in Hungary are reporting that the potential health effects of last October's Red Mud Disaster, one of the worst environmental accidents in Europe, may be less dangerous than previously feared. Their study, reported in ACS's journal *Environmental Science & Technology*, concludes that the dust from the mud may be no more harmful than particles of ordinary urban air pollution.

Mihály Pósfai and colleagues point out that a burst dam at a factory that processes aluminum ore last October inundated areas near Ajka in northern Hungary with more than 700,000 cubic yards of caustic red mud. Ten people died and dozens were injured. Since the mud contained

potentially toxic substances, concern arose about the [health effects](#) of inhaling [dust](#) formed when the mud dried and was swept into the air by wind.

They studied the chemical and physical properties of the red mud particles and dust and concluded that particles of red mud dust were too large to be inhaled deeply into lungs, where they could cause the most damage. Although the resuspension potential of [red mud](#) dust is large, inhalation likely would cause irritation and coughing, but would not increase the risk of other more serious health problems, the report suggested.

More information: "The red mud accident in Ajka (Hungary): Characterization and potential health effects of fugitive dust", *Environmental Science & Technology*.

Provided by American Chemical Society

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