

S. Korea probes toxic leak as impact worsens

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According to [health officials](#), more than 600 people, including local residents and firefighters, have required treatment in the wake of the September 27 leak of hydrochloric acid at chemical maker Hube Global's factory in Gumi.

Five people were killed in an initial explosion that led to the leak as workers were unloading acid from a tanker.

But the fallout from the incident may have been far more damaging than originally thought, and a 26-member team of experts and government officials began a three-day probe Friday to gauge the severity of the situation.

"Based upon the investigation results, the government will actively consider declaring the affected region a special disaster zone," the prime minister's office said in a statement.

The hundreds treated for inhaling [toxic fumes](#) from the leak complained of nausea, chest pain, rashes, sore eyes and scratchy throats. Some of them found blood in their saliva.

Crops and fruit on more than 90 hectares (222.3 acres) of land have withered, and some 1,300 [livestock animals](#) have been exhibiting symptoms similar to a cold, Yonhap news agency said.

"This is basically a miniature Bhopal," Kim Jeong-Soo, an environmentalist in Gumi told AFP by phone, in reference to the 1984 [gas leak](#) incident in India that claimed thousands of lives.

If designated a [disaster zone](#), residents would be eligible for financial aid, tax cuts and compensation.

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