

Toxic waste defiles defunct chemical plant in Hungary

April 30 2015, byPablo Gorondi



This is a handout image made available by Greenpeace dated on April 7, 2015, of corroded and leaking barrels are seen being stored on the yard of the Budapest Chemical Works in Budapest, Hungary. Greenpeace says that leaking, rusted barrels full of toxic materials stored in the open at a defunct chemicals company in Hungary could cause an environmental catastrophe. The government says it will take months before the chemicals are removed and the area can be cleaned up. (Gergely Simon/Greenpeace via AP)

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the open at a defunct chemical company in Hungary could cause an environmental catastrophe. The government says it will take months before the chemicals are removed and the area can be cleaned up.

Gergely Simon, a Greenpeace chemicals expert, called the situation at the Budapest Chemical Works "near catastrophic." He said toxic materials like benzene were seeping into the ground water up to 60 meters (200 feet) deep at concentrations up to 100,000 times the allowed limits.

Zsolt V. Nemeth, state secretary for environmental protection and agricultural development, said while disaster management officials have declared there is no "direct catastrophic situation," environmental authorities are urging immediate action.

"We are turning to the government for funds to be able to remove and dispose properly of the barrels," Nemeth told the Associated Press. "Then comes the second phase, the cleanup of the area."

Since the company is controlled by a liquidator, Nemeth said changes to bankruptcy laws, a survey of the materials in the barrels and a public procurement process are needed before the state can take over the cleanup.

"Months are needed until we can begin this job in earnest," Nemeth said.

After the barrels are removed, cleansing the contaminated soil and water will take years and cost up to 10 billion forints (\$36 million), Nemeth said.

Simon said the condition of the barrels had deteriorated greatly in the last few years and many had missing or incomplete identification labels.

He said any chemical fires caused by lightning or summer heat could spread to other hazardous materials being used by other companies at the same site.



This file photo taken Sept. 28, 2006 shows the Budapest Chemical Works plant in Ferencvaros, 9th district of Budapest, Hungary. Greenpeace says leaking, rusted barrels full of toxic materials stored in the open at a defunct chemicals company could cause an environmental catastrophe but the Hungarian government says it will take months before the hazardous chemicals are removed and the area can be cleaned up. (Miklos Vali/MTI via AP, File)

Istvan Kurthy, who lives in a nearby housing project, has lobbied authorities to deal with the problem.

"Until now, there has been little said about this issue," Kurthy said, adding that an "unpleasant chemical smell" drove him into action.



This file photo taken Sept. 28, 2006 shows the Budapest Chemical Works plant in Ferencváros, 9th district of Budapest, Hungary. Greenpeace says leaking, rusted barrels full of toxic materials stored in the open at a defunct chemicals company could cause an environmental catastrophe but the Hungarian government says it will take months before the hazardous chemicals are removed and the area can be cleaned up. (Miklos Vali/MTI via AP, File)



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