

BHP Billiton rejects UN anger over 'toxic' mud slide

November 26 2015



A fireman rescues a dog that was trapped in the mud that swept through the Village of Bento Rodrigues, in Paracatu de Baixo, Minas Gerais, Brazil on November 9, 2015

Mining giants responsible for a dam spill in Brazil earlier this month rejected Thursday accusations by the United Nations that the deadly flood of water and mud was highly toxic.

The United Nations blasted Brazil's government and the co-owners of the Samarco [iron ore](#) mine—Vale and BHP Billiton, the world's biggest mining company—for a failure to respond to what it said was "the risk of exposure to [toxic chemicals](#)."

Two UN environment experts issued a statement late Wednesday accusing the government and the corporations of failing in their duties after the November 5 collapse of a waste-water dam at the Samarco mine.

The sudden floods killed at least 13 people and left 11 missing, according to the latest count, but there are also growing concerns about the composition of the muddy waste which has since flowed along the Doce river and into the Atlantic.

The UN experts said new evidence pointed to "high levels of toxic heavy metals and other toxic chemicals in the river Doce."

"It is not acceptable that it has taken three weeks for information about the toxic risks of the mining disaster to surface," the UN special rapporteur on human rights and the environment, John Knox, and the special rapporteur on [human rights](#) and hazardous substances and wastes, Baskut Tuncak, said in a statement.

But Australia's BHP Billiton said the water and debris posed no danger.

"The tailings that entered the Rio Doce were comprised of clay and silt material from the washing and processing of earth containing iron ore, which is naturally abundant in the region," the corporation said in a statement.

"Based on available data, the tailings are chemically stable. They will not change chemical composition in water and will behave in the

environment like normal soils in the catchment."

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