

Peru declares mercury poison emergency due to gold mining

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Fishing boats lie at sundown tied up on the shore at a port in the Puerto Maldonado city on the banks of the Madre de Dios River near Lima on October 3, 2014

Peru declared an environmental emergency on Monday in 11 Amazon jungle districts where mercury pollution blamed on unregulated gold mining is poisoning people and fish.

Tests in the southeastern Madre de Dios region found "[mercury pollution](#) above the maximum permitted level, affecting river water, water species and local populations," said a report announcing the decision in the official government gazette.

Environmental authorities detected high levels of mercury in local people's bodies which "can cause serious, chronic and complex health problems, particularly in children and pregnant women," it said.

Mercury poisoning can affect vital functions such as the nerves, digestive system, lungs and kidneys, according to the World Health Organization.

Monday's report blamed the pollution on "unsuitable practices by illegal and unregulated [mining](#) during the extraction of gold."

Environment Minister Manuel Pulgar-Vidal said the state of emergency involved sending medical aid and non-contaminated food supplies to the region.

He said authorities have advised local people not to eat a species of catfish common in the region that has also been contaminated by the mercury.

"We are going to suffer the consequences of mining activity in Madre de Dios for the next 80 years," the minister told a news conference.

"We have to attack the root of this problem" by shutting down illegal mining operations, he said.

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