

Beijingers sup from worst river in China

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By Zhang Hui

About 60 percent of the Haihe River is severely polluted by heavy industry and poses a serious danger to the food and drinking water of Beijing, environmental watchdogs warned Saturday.

"The Haihe River has become the most severely polluted river in the country and its pollutants account for one tenth of the entire country," said Environmental Protection Minister Zhou Shengxian on Friday.

Beijing sits in the upper reaches of the Haihe that flows through seven cities and provinces including Tianjin, Shanxi Province and the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

Beijingers don't drink water directly from the Haihe, but most of the mineral water residents drink is produced in Tianjin, warned NGO water expert Zhang Junfeng Saturday.

Most of that mineral water is sourced from Tianjin's mother river the Haihe, Zhang said.

"We drink what we discharge," he said.

Industrial waste does not actually form the lion's share of the waste around Beijing's section of the river, Zhang said.

"All residential water including bath water and toilet flushing discharges into the Haihe River," he said.

All the sewage flows into the Bohai Sea from where Beijing gets its seafood.

"So all the sewage we discharge comes around back into our body."

Chemical pollutants in bathing water and toilet water increase the risk of cancer, Zhang said.

Minister Zhou urged Beijing, Tianjin and other developed regions to try pioneering technology that transforms sewage into resources, the Xinhua New Agency reported Saturday.

There are two solutions to the stinky Haihe River, Zhang said: build up sewage treatment plants and cut down on waste discharged by residents.

Average water consumption per person should be about three tons a month, but Beijingers use seven a month, Zhang explained.

The Ministry of Environmental Protection would tighten the supervision and management of factory pollutants and strictly punish those who failed to meet pollutant discharge standards, according to the Legal Mirror.