

# China Port Explosions Release Deadly Chemical, Prompting Fear and Outrage

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The death toll from [this week's fiery explosions](#) at the Chinese port of Tianjin [climbed](#) above 100 on Saturday, while confusion [spread](#) over whether authorities had ordered the evacuation of everyone within two miles amid fears of chemical contamination.

[According](#) to news reports, an evacuation order came after an apparent change in wind direction, and as police confirmed the highly toxic chemical sodium cyanide was found near the site of successive blasts that were so big they were [seen from space](#).

Anti-chemical warfare troops have entered the site, [according](#) to the *BBC*.

*Reuters* [reports](#):

*Evacuees were advised to wear long trousers and face masks as they "evacuated in an orderly fashion", according to a post on the official microblog of the Tianjin branch of the National Health and Family Planning Commission of China. The streets appeared calm.*

*But not all was clear amid emotional scenes as families of missing fire fighters sought answers about their loved ones and officials tried to keep media cameras away. Gong Jiansheng, a district official, told reporters there had been no evacuation.*

The *Associated Press* [adds](#):

*Two Chinese news outlets, including the state-run The Paper, reported that the warehouse was storing 700 tons of sodium cyanide – 70 times more than it should have been holding at one time – and that authorities were rushing to clean it up.*

*Sodium cyanide is a toxic chemical that can form a flammable gas upon contact with water.*

And the *New York Times* [writes](#) that “Orders for a large-scale evacuation of the neighborhoods closest to the blast were quickly rescinded, underscoring the government’s halting efforts to cope with one of China’s worst industrial accidents in recent years.”

“The company that owned the warehouse where the blasts originated, Rui Hai International Logistics, appears to have violated Chinese law by operating close to apartment buildings and worker dormitories,” journalist Andrew Jacobs reports for the *Times*. “Residents say they were unaware that the company was handling dangerous materials.”

About 6,300 people have been displaced by the blasts, with around 721 injured and 33 in serious condition, *Xinhua* news agency [said](#). At least 21 firefighters are reported dead.

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