

Polluted pools spur nationwide probe

China has launched a thorough investigation into the pollution of soil throughout the country and will release the final results to the public later, top environmental protection officials said on Friday.

"I can declare today that the Ministry of Environmental Protection will treat all soil polluting cases with no tolerance once we have found them," Tian Weiyong, head of the Environmental Inspection Bureau under the Ministry of Environmental Protection, said on Friday, after an NGO discovered two untreated sewage pits filled with hazardous industrial waste.

Photos of the polluted pools, provided by the Chongqing Liangjiang Voluntary Service Center, went viral on Tuesday. The pits were found in Dacheng county of Langfang, Hebei province, and in Tianjin's Jinghai district.

The ministry launched an investigation with the Hebei government immediately after the photos were shown online. According to the Langfang government, several officials of Dacheng county in charge of environmental protection have been suspended from their posts, and the local government has invited experts to work on a plan for restoration of the area.

Restoration will be completed by the end of September, the local government vowed.

A preliminary local investigation found that the sewage had strong acidic qualities, which was caused by waste from acid-washing at steel and iron plants and electroplating factories, said Yan Jingjun, deputy head of the ministry's Environmental Inspection Bureau. Yan is in charge of the joint investigation teams with Hebei and Tianjin.

"But all the pits are located at deserted land that is far away from residential areas, and no villagers nearby drink underground water," Yan said.

As for the pits in Tianjin, the ministry said the municipality solved the pollution in 14 out of 18 similar pits in Jinghai district since 2014, and plans to deal with the remaining four pits.

"Actions of pouring hazardous waste into the pools has broken the law and will be dealt with seriously," said Tian, the inspection bureau head.

"We are extremely open to all kinds of NGOs, the public and the media helping to provide oversight, so we can improve our environment," he added.

According to China's Water Pollution Prevention and Control Law adopted in 2008, discharging noxious sewage water and other waste into wells, pits, cracks and caves is forbidden.

Discharging pollutants into pits and wells has been defined as a crime of contaminating the environment based on a judicial interpretation released in

2013 by the Supreme People's Court and Supreme People's Procuratorate.