

183 people punished in 5 major accidents

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China has punished 183 people, including government officials, who were responsible for five major accidents that killed 189, a senior supervision official said Tuesday.

Among the total, 78 have been handed over to prosecutors and 105 have received discipline punishments, including dismissals and demotions, Vice Supervision Minister Wang Wei told a press conference in Beijing.



The State Council, or cabinet, has concluded investigations into the five fatal accidents, of which three occurred in 2007, and one in 2006 and one in 2005.

The most severe sentence was life imprisonment given to Zhang Xiaodong, deputy general manager of the Pudeng Coal Mine in Linfen, northern province of Shanxi, where a gas blast killed 28 people and injured another 23, on May 5, 2007.

The bridge collapse in Fenghuang, central province of Hunan, killed 64 people and injured 22 on Aug. 13 last year. A molten steel spill in Tieling, northeastern province of Liaoning, killed 32 and injured six on April 18, 2007.

Thirty-four miners were killed in a colliery fire in Jinzhong, Shanxi, on Nov. 12, 2006 and 32 dead in a powder explosion occurred as a bus collided with a powder-loaded truck in eastern province of Jianxi on March 17, 2005.

The official blamed illegal production, lack of effective safety management and supervision, and government corruption, in some cases, for the fatal accidents.

Some officials at the transport authorities in Xiangxi, Hunan, took bribes from the bridge construction contractors, Wang gave an example by citing preliminary investigation results as saying.

The government at various levels would impose severe punishments for those who acted as protective umbrellas, covered up accidents, or defied investigations, he said.

"We are working with the justice authorities to seek severe punishments for those responsible, and to undercover any corrupt collusions between government and business."

"We have made corruption probes compulsory in our investigations and also welcome exposure of accidents by the public and media," Li Yizhong, head of the State Administration of Work Safety, told reporters.

Li noted the work safety situations in the country were still severe, although the death toll in various accidents fell to 101,480 last year, 27.2 percent lower than the record high in 2002.

"The death toll is still too big, and the occurrence of major accidents have not been effectively curbed."

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- A:** In order to put the protection of giant pandas and other wildlife under the law, the Chinese government put the protection of rare animals and plants into the Constitution.

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curbed.

"There is still uncertainty in the work safety situations in some regions and industries, and we also have many weaknesses and loopholes in our work," Li acknowledged.

As to recent foreign media reports that China covered up the deaths of workers building the main stadium for the Beijing Olympics, Li said it was the first time he had ever heard of that but he attached great importance to the information.

He said he welcomed public scrutiny and would order the Beijing work safety authorities to launch an investigation.

"If there were such accidents, serious punishment would be given to those responsible according to the law."

(Xinhua News Agency January 23, 2008)

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