

whose high-profile friends, along with another man of included former boxer Rubin

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# As China grows, so do mounds of garbage

Associated Press

ZHANGLIDONG, China — Visitors can smell this village long before they see it.

More than 100 dump trucks piled high with garbage line the narrow road leading to Zhanglidong, waiting to empty their loads in a landfill as big as 20 football fields.

In less than five years, the Zhengzhou Comprehensive Waste Treatment Landfill has overwhelmed this otherwise pristine village of about 1,000 people. Peaches and cherries rot on trees, infested with insect life drawn by the smell. Fields lie unharvested, contaminated by toxic muck. Every day, another 100 or so tons of garbage arrive from nearby Zhengzhou, a provincial capital of 8 million.

"Life here went from heaven to hell in an instant," says lifelong resident Wang Xiuhua, swatting away clouds of mosquitoes and flies. The 78-year-old woman suddenly coughs uncontrollably and says the landfill gases inflame her bronchitis.

As more Chinese ride the nation's economic boom, a torrent of garbage is one result. Cities are bursting at the seams, and their officials struggle to cope.



In this photo taken Tuesday, Aug. 18, workers sort garbage at a trash recycling center in Beijing, China. AP photo

The amount of paper, plastic and other garbage has more than tripled in two decades to about 300 million tons a year, according to Nie Yongfeng, a waste management expert at Beijing's Tsinghua University.

Americans are still way ahead of China in garbage; a population less than a quarter the size of China's 1.3 billion generated 254 million tons of garbage in 2007, a third of which is recycled or composted, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

But for China, the problem represents a rapid turnabout from a generation ago, when families, then largely rural and poor, used and reused everything.

"Trash was never complicated before, because we didn't have supermarkets, we didn't have fancy packaging and endless things to buy," said Nie.

In Zhanglidong, villagers engage in shouting matches with drivers and sometimes try to bodily block their garbage trucks coming from Zhengzhou, 20 miles away.

"Zhengzhou is spotless because their trash is dumped into our village," says Li Qiaohong, who blames it for her 5-year-old son's eczema.

Li's family is one of a few who live within 100 meters (300 feet) of the landfill, separated from it by a fence. These families get 100 yuan (\$15) a month in government compensation.

The dump has poisoned not just the air and ground, but relationships. Villagers say they were never consulted, and suspect their Communist Party officials were paid to accept the landfill.

In China, especially in rural regions, there is often no recourse once local officials make a decision. The villagers say not only were their petitions ignored, but they were warned by the Zhengzhou police to stop protesting or face punishment.

"We villagers were too naive ... we didn't know what a landfill was," said Li. "If we had known earlier about all the pollution it would cause, we would have done everything possible to stop the construction process. Now it's too late."

Regulations allow incinerators to emit 10 times the level of dioxins permitted in the U.S., and these release cancer-causing dioxins and other poisons, according to a Chinese government study.

"If the government doesn't step up efforts to solve our garbage woes, China will likely face an impending health crisis in the coming decade," warns Liu Yangsheng, an expert in waste management at Peking University.