



# Fatal lung disease could affect over 100 silicon workers

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GUIYANG - Thirty-eight workers at a southwest China silicon factory have been confirmed as having silicosis, an incurable lung disease, and the number was likely to rise to more than 100, health and safety authorities in Guizhou Province said Friday.

Working conditions at Hengsheng Metallurgy Limited Liability Company were so bad that 38 workers had contracted the disease by April 5, said a statement issued Friday by the Guizhou provincial work safety administrative committee, a coordination organization.

The provincial health department was checking the health of other workers who worked or used to work in the company, and the number of sick workers would probably exceed 100, a department spokesman said.

Thirty-five of the workers were being treated in hospital, the statement from the Guizhou provincial work safety administrative committee said.

The privately-owned company would bear all hospital expenses and continue paying the salaries of the sick workers as well as a subsidy of 800 yuan per month to their families taking care of them in hospital, Li Fuzhong, vice president of the company, told Xinhua.

The amount of any compensation was yet to be determined, Li said.

The company had been ordered to suspend production from April 3.

No legal process has been instigated, but the local government authorities are representing the workers in their dealings with the company.

An investigation, organized by the State Council, China's Cabinet, earlier this month found that no monitoring or examination of the workers' health had been carried out.

The county had no occupational health clinics for the workers, the investigation found.

Silicosis is an incurable lung disease caused by inhaling silica dust while drilling, cutting, crushing, grinding or blasting slabs containing silicon.

Symptoms include dry coughing, fatigue, loss of appetite, breathing difficulties, chest pains, and eventually death.

Hengsheng, founded in 1999, is known as Asia's largest silicon-producing company. It is based in Shibing County of Guizhou's Qiandongnan Miao and Dong Autonomous Prefecture.

It is a private company owned by Liu Zhenrong and five other share holders, all of whom are from south China's Hunan Province.

It has more than 1,000 workers and 34 smelting furnaces, with an annual production of 120,000 tonnes of industrial silicon.