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Water supply returns to Chinese city

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28 November, 2005

THE ARTICLE

Water supply returns to Chinese city

Authorities have reconnected running water in Harbin, the city in northeast China that had its supply cut off because of a huge chemical spill in the nearby Songhua River. According to China's Xinhua news agency, the pumps were turned on at 6 pm local time on Nov. 27. People no longer have to stand in line in freezing conditions for water rations. The city's 3.8 million people had been without water for more than four days following the dumping of 100 tons of benzene into the river on Nov. 22. Exposure to the colorless and toxic chemical can cause anemia, various forms of cancer and blood disorders, as well as liver and kidney damage. The spill is an embarrassment to President Hu Jintao's government because of its pledge to protect the environment.

In an attempt to reassure the inhabitants of his populous city that the water was safe to drink, the provincial governor of Harbin, Zhang Zujoi, took a few sips of boiled water that had come from the tap of a local resident's house. Mr. Zujoi promised four days ago that he would be first to sample the water following the supply's reconnection. He said: "I took the first drink to fulfill the government's solemn promise...It was also meant to reassure the public and dispel their worries." However, he could not totally allay public fears as he advised people not to drink the water unboiled until the benzene was fully flushed from water pipes. Meanwhile, the 50-kilometre-long toxic slick is meandering toward Siberia, where it will threaten the Russian city of Khabarovsk in about two weeks.

WARM-UPS

1. WATER SEARCH: Walk around the class and ask other students for information on water. Find out as much as you can. After you have finished, sit with your partner(s) and share your information. What were you happy about learning? What surprised you most about water?

2. TAKE FOR GRANTED: In pairs / groups, talk about the things below that we take for granted. What would you do if these things suddenly disappeared? What problems would their disappearance cause?

- Water
- The ability to speak English
- The hair on your head
- Toilets
- The Internet
- Friends
- Teeth
- Watches and clocks

3. CHAT: In pairs / groups, decide which of these topics or words are most interesting and which are most boring.

Running water / chemical spills / China's news agencies / standing in line / freezing weather / toxic chemicals / the environment / promises / public fears / Siberia

Have a chat about the topics you liked. For more conversation, change topics and partners frequently.

4. NOT ME: If the water in your city had been dangerously contaminated, would you be the first to drink it to show the public it was safe? Which of the following would you do or not do?

- Drink the water in Harbin
- Work for a week in Baghdad
- Eat chicken in Vietnam
- Fly in a prototype rocket
- Be a guinea pig for a new drug
- Train to be a lion tamer
- Use a mobile phone amid brain tumor scares
- Be a stuntman / stuntwoman

5. ENVIRONMENT OPINIONS: Do you agree with these opinions on the environment? Discuss them with your partner(s).

- a. The Earth will eventually die because of pollution.
- b. World governments need to put the environment before their economies.
- c. A seriously polluted river is another nail in the coffin for the Earth.
- d. World leaders will only take necessary action after it is too late.
- e. George W. Bush's policies towards the environment are a disgrace.
- f. The UN should have powers to force countries to clean up their acts.
- g. New technologies will help clean up and forever protect the Earth.
- h. Mutant fish from toxic rivers will one day make all fish dangerous to eat.
- i. China's pollution controls need to be inspected by UN observers.

6. WATER: Spend one minute writing down all of the different words you associate with the word "water". Share your words with your partner(s) and talk about them. Together, put the words into different categories.

BEFORE READING / LISTENING

1. TRUE / FALSE: Look at the article's headline and guess whether these sentences are true (T) or false (F):

- a. Residents of a Chinese city have had their water supply reconnected. T / F
- b. A nuclear accident contaminated the city's river for four days. T / F
- c. People stood in line for water in freezing weather conditions. T / F
- d. The accident is embarrassing for President Hu Jintao's government. T / F
- e. The city has a very small population. T / F
- f. President Hu Jintao drank the city's water to attest to its safety. T / F
- g. The city's people can now drink the water without boiling it. T / F
- h. A long toxic slick is meandering toward a city in Siberia. T / F

2. SYNONYM MATCH: Match the following synonyms from the article:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| a. spill | residents |
| b. stand in line | illnesses |
| c. toxic | drifting |
| d. disorders | alleviate |
| e. pledge | keep |
| f. inhabitants | queue |
| g. sips | promise |
| h. fulfill | noxious |
| i. allay | discharge |
| j. meandering | drinks |

3. PHRASE MATCH: Match the following phrases from the article (sometimes more than one combination is possible):

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| a. Authorities have reconnected running | toxic chemical can cause anemia |
| b. a huge chemical spill in | inhabitants of his populous city |
| c. stand in line | public fears |
| d. Exposure to the colorless and | in freezing conditions |
| e. an embarrassment to | from water pipes |
| f. an attempt to reassure the | water in Harbin |
| g. fulfill the government's | is meandering toward Siberia |
| h. he could not totally allay | President Hu Jintao's government |
| i. the benzene was fully flushed | solemn promise |
| j. the 50-kilometre-long toxic slick | the nearby Songhua River |

WHILE READING / LISTENING

WHOOPS: Five of the ten words in bold in each paragraph are mistakes. With your partner(s), identify them and agree on replacement words.

Water supply returns to Chinese city

Authorities have **disconnected** running water in Harbin, the city in northeast China that had its supply cut off because of a huge chemical **spill** in the nearby Songhua River. According to China's Xinhua news agency, the **pimps** were turned on at 6 pm local time on Nov. 27. People no longer have to stand in **lane** in freezing conditions for water **rations**. The city's 3.8 million people had been without water for more than four days following the **duping** of 100 tons of benzene into the river on Nov. 22. **Exposure** to the colorless and toxic chemical can cause anemia, various forms of cancer and blood **disorders**, as well as liver and kidney **damage**. The spill is an embarrassment to President Hu Jintao's government because of its pledge to **violate** the environment.

In an attempt to reassure the inhabitants of his **population** city that the water was safe to drink, the **provincial** governor of Harbin, Zhang Zujoi, took a few **snips** of boiled water that had come from the tap of a local resident's house. Mr. Zujoi promised four days ago that he would be first to **sample** the water following the supply's reconnection. He said: "I took the first drink to fulfill the government's **solemn** promise...It was also meant to reassure the public and **dispel** their worries." However, he could not totally **ally** public fears as he advised people not to drink the water unboiled until the benzene was **partially** flushed from water pipes. **However**, the 50-kilometre-long toxic slick is **meandering** toward Siberia, where it will threaten the Russian city of Khabarovsk in about two weeks.

LISTENING

Listen and fill in the spaces.

Water supply returns to Chinese city

Authorities have _____ running water in Harbin, the city in northeast China that had its supply cut off because of a huge chemical _____ in the nearby Songhua River. According to China's Xinhua news agency, the _____ were turned on at 6 pm local time on Nov. 27. People no longer have to stand in line in freezing conditions for water _____. The city's 3.8 million people had been without water for more than four days following the dumping of 100 tons of benzene into the river on Nov. 22. Exposure to the _____ and toxic chemical can cause anemia, various forms of cancer and blood _____, as well as liver and kidney damage. The spill is an embarrassment to President Hu Jintao's government because of its _____ to protect the environment.

In an attempt to reassure the inhabitants of his _____ city that the water was safe to drink, the provincial governor of Harbin, Zhang Zujoi, took a few _____ of boiled water that had come from the tap of a local resident's house. Mr. Zujoi promised four days ago that he would be first to _____ the water following the supply's reconnection. He said: "I took the first drink to _____ the government's _____ promise...It was also meant to reassure the public and dispel their worries." However, he could not totally _____ public fears as he advised people not to drink the water unboiled until the benzene was fully _____ from water pipes. Meanwhile, the 50-kilometre-long toxic slick is _____ toward Siberia, where it will threaten the Russian city of Khabarovsk in about two weeks.

AFTER READING / LISTENING

1. WORD SEARCH: Look in your dictionaries / computer to find collocates, other meanings, information, synonyms ... for the words 'chemical' and 'spill'.

- Share your findings with your partners.
- Make questions using the words you found.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

2. ARTICLE QUESTIONS: Look back at the article and write down some questions you would like to ask the class about the text.

- Share your questions with other classmates / groups.
- Ask your partner / group your questions.

3. WHOOPS: In pairs / groups, compare your answers to this exercise. Check your answers. Talk about the words from the activity. Were they new, interesting, worth learning...?

4. VOCABULARY: Circle any words you do not understand. In groups, pool unknown words and use dictionaries to find their meanings.

5. STUDENT "CHEMICAL SPILL" SURVEY: In pairs / groups, write down questions about chemical spills and other manmade environmental disasters.

- Ask other classmates your questions and note down their answers.
- Go back to your original partner / group and compare your findings.
- Make mini-presentations to other groups on your findings.

6. TEST EACH OTHER: Look at the words below. With your partner, try to recall exactly how these were used in the text:

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| • running | • reassure |
| • pumps | • tap |
| • line | • sample |
| • dumping | • solemn |
| • exposure | • fears |
| • pledge | • meandering |

DISCUSSION

STUDENT A's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student B)

- a. Did the headline make you want to read the article?
- b. How do you feel when you hear news of manmade environmental disasters?
- c. Who do you think is to blame for this benzene spill?
- d. What do you think should happen to those responsible for the spill?
- e. How clean or polluted are the rivers in your country?
- f. Do you think your government does enough to protect the natural environment in your country?
- g. What problems would it cause if you had no water for a week?
- h. Are you happy about drinking the tap water in your country?
- i. Which countries do you think are the world's worst polluters?
- j. What do you think should be done about these countries?

STUDENT B's QUESTIONS (Do not show these to student A)

- a. Did you like reading this article?
- b. What do you think about what you read?
- c. What do you think of President Hu Jintao's pledge to protect the environment following decades of rapid industrialization?
- d. Do you trust what your government says about the environment and things like water safety or disaster preparedness?
- e. Have you ever been without something vital for any length of time?
- f. If you were provincial governor, would you have drunk the water in Harbin to allay people's fears about the water's safety?
- g. Are you reassured by your government leader's words?
- h. For how much longer do you think the Earth can survive manmade disasters and destruction?
- i. How do you think Russians feel that their water supply will be contaminated by a chemical spill in China?
- j. Did you like this discussion?

AFTER DISCUSSION: Join another partner / group and tell them what you talked about.

- a. What was the most interesting thing you heard?
- b. Was there a question you didn't like?
- c. Was there something you totally disagreed with?
- d. What did you like talking about?
- e. Which was the most difficult question?

SPEAKING

BEING WITHOUT: How would you cope with being deprived of everyday things you take for granted in life? In pairs / groups, discuss the possible things you could do to survive without the necessities below for one week:

NECESSITIES	SURVIVAL TECHNIQUES
Running water	
Electricity	
Clothes	
Teeth	
The Internet	
Mobile phone	
Sleep	
Other _____	

- Change partners and compare and share your ideas.
- Decide on the best technique for surviving without each of the necessities.
- Return to your original partner(s) and discuss the ideas you talked about with your previous partner.
- Talk about how would you cope / feel if you had to survive using the techniques you decided on.

HOMEWORK

1. VOCABULARY EXTENSION: Choose several of the words from the text. Use a dictionary or Google's search field (or another search engine) to build up more associations / collocations of each word.

2. INTERNET: Search the Internet and find more information on the meandering toxic slick. What are Russian authorities doing to prepare for it? How is it affecting Sino-Russian relations? Share your findings with your class in the next lesson. Did you all find out similar things?

3. DISASTER: Make a poster giving information on any environmental catastrophe that has affected the world. Include a section on what we can do to prevent such a disaster from reoccurring. Show your posters to your classmates in your next lesson. Did you all think of similar things?

4. WATERLESS: You have been without running water now for over a week. Write your diary / journal entry for day eight of being waterless. How have you coped? Have you found any good ways to survive? How do you feel? Show what you wrote to your classmates in the next lesson. Did you all write about similar things?

ANSWERS

TRUE / FALSE:

- a. T b. F c. T d. T e. F f. F g. F h. T

SYNONYM MATCH:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| a. spill | discharge |
| b. stand in line | queue |
| c. toxic | noxious |
| d. disorders | illnesses |
| e. pledge | promise |
| f. inhabitants | residents |
| g. sips | drinks |
| h. fulfill | keep |
| i. allay | alleviate |
| j. meandering | drifting |

PHRASE MATCH:

- | | |
|---|----------------------------------|
| a. Authorities have reconnected running | water in Harbin |
| b. a huge chemical spill in | the nearby Songhua River |
| c. stand in line | in freezing conditions |
| d. Exposure to the colorless and | toxic chemical can cause anemia |
| e. an embarrassment to | President Hu Jintao's government |
| f. an attempt to reassure the | inhabitants of his populous city |
| g. fulfill the government's | solemn promise |
| h. he could not totally allay | public fears |
| i. the benzene was fully flushed | from water pipes |
| j. the 50-kilometre-long toxic slick | is meandering toward Siberia |

WHOOOPS:

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In an attempt to reassure the inhabitants of his **populous** city that the water was safe to drink, the provincial governor of Harbin, Zhang Zujoi, took a few **sips** of boiled water that had come from the tap of a local resident's house. Mr. Zujoi promised four days ago that he would be first to sample the water following the supply's reconnection. He said: "I took the first drink to fulfill the government's solemn promise...It was also meant to reassure the public and dispel their worries." However, he could not totally **allay** public fears as he advised people not to drink the water unboiled until the benzene was **fully** flushed from water pipes. **Meanwhile**, the 50-kilometre-long toxic slick is meandering toward Siberia, where it will threaten the Russian city of Khabarovsk in about two weeks.