

Toxic agent found in rice in Tak

■ *Sirinart Sirisunthorn*

THE NATION

AN AWARD-WINNING jasmine rice grown in Tak province was found to have unacceptable levels of cadmium contamination, Natural Resources and Environment Minister Prapat Panyachatraksa said yesterday.

He said the Pollution Control Department discovered cadmium contamination of up to 10 times the standard limit in rice from Tambon Pratatpadaeng, in Mae Sot District. But the contamination of the soil and water was relatively low, he said.

The Communicable Disease Control Department will next week receive the results of blood tests carried out on villagers, but unofficial reports from doctors suggest that some of the villagers have traces of cadmium exceeding safety limits.

"The villagers must stop consuming the rice. But they need not panic, because it takes about 10 years to accumulate enough cadmium for it to cause health problems," said Adisak Thongkaimuk, deputy director-general of the Pollution Control Department.

The government was alerted to the situation when the International Water Management Institute found that 401 samples of rice had cadmium contamination.

The ministry suggested rice plantations in the area be suspended for a few years to improve the soil. The farmers would be given compensation for lost income.

Doctors said if the farmers do not stop consuming rice, they would face cadmium-related diseases such as itai itai, kidney failure and osteoporosis.

Tambon Pratatpadaeng has won awards in the last two years for Thailand's best jasmine rice.