

High levels of cadmium found in rice

Tak villagers put at risk of bone damage

Ranjana Wangvipula

Threats of cadmium contamination in remote villages in Tak province were confirmed yesterday by the Pollution Control Department (PCD) in its latest report of unusually high levels of the deadly heavy metal in local rice grains.

Tests of more than 30 grain samples collected by PCD officials from Mae Tao Mai and Pha Dei riverside villages found between 0.7 and over 2 milligrammes of cadmium per kilogramme of rice, exceeding the international limit of 0.2.

"The figures appear to correspond with those earlier reported by IWMI," said the department's deputy chief Adisak Thongkaimook.

In its 2002 report, IWMI or International Water Management Institute, a research agency focusing on wise use of water and land resources, found samples of soil, rice, garlic, and soya bean containing harmful levels of bone-damaging cadmium.

The agency conducted its tests in tambons Mae Tao and Phrathat Phadang in Tak's Mae Sot district.

The two villages recently visited by PCD officials are also in tambon Phrathat Phadang, known for its fragrant jasmine rice which won a national award twice in 2002 and 2003.

The IWMI report prompted environmental officials to rush to the affected villages and collected samples of rice grain, water, and soil for re-examination.

Except in the rice samples, no harmful levels of cadmium were found in groundwater, Mae Tao creek, or observation ponds near zinc mines suspected to be the sources of cadmium leakage. Tests also showed no high levels of cadmium in fish samples.

The department was still waiting for soil test results.

However, its initial findings were enough to prompt the Natural Resources and Environment Ministry to plan rehabilitation measures for the affected areas.