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Lead-poisoned Dominican town now a 'success'

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Lead poisoning has fallen dramatically in a Dominican town once considered one of the world's most contaminated zones, the watchdog group Blacksmith Institute said Wednesday.

The New York-based group, which listed Bajos de Haina on its most-polluted-places list three years ago, included it Wednesday on a list of 12 success stories from around the world.

A battery recycler poured lead into the ground for decades there, sickening nine in 10 children. In 2007, Blacksmith drew public attention to the problem to help clean it up.

Dominican government officials, academics and the factory's owners worked together to design and execute a cleanup project, which the group calls the first of its kind in the Caribbean nation.

Among other steps, a pit full of lead dust where children played two years ago will be cleaned up and converted into a public park.

Though still relatively high, average lead counts fell from 71 to 28 micrograms of lead per deciliter of blood, Blacksmith said.

Any lead can be toxic, especially for children. Many who were poisoned as children will suffer neurological problems for life, the institute said.

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