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Abandoned oilfield a toxic wasteland in South Sudan

Amid civil war, contamination from an abandoned oilfield poses new threat to besieged civilians.

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Leer, South Sudan - The Thar Jath oilfield in South Sudan's war-torn Unity state has been abandoned.

The unmaintained facility, which lies inside rebel-held territory, is slowly rotting and leaking toxic oil into the earth.

According to rebel soldiers stationed in the area, international employees deserted the oilfield in August 2013, four months before civil war broke out in South Sudan.

Researchers from German aid group Sign of Hope and water drilling experts African Water Ltd have [released the results](#) of an extensive investigation showing that drinking water sources for at least 180,000 people in Unity state have been contaminated by oil exploration and production here.



Soaked in oil: The cost of war in South Sudan

Wells dug for communities contain water with salt levels so high that it is undrinkable. Abnormal heavy metal deposits such as lead and zinc were also found in the water supply.

The investigation found no natural source for the salt levels and presence of heavy metals in the water supply. The researchers attribute the contamination to oil extraction activities and poor waste disposal procedures.

Villagers cannot use their contaminated wells and instead are sourcing water from swamps and rivers, increasing the risk of catching deadly water-borne diseases.

Currently, rebel officials say the government and oil companies have no presence at these oilfields and safe drinking water sources for the population are disappearing.

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The
Thar
Jath
oil
extraction
plant
in
South
Sudan's
Unity
state
was
abandoned
by the
oil
company
in late
2013.
Four

months
later,
civil
war
broke
out
across
the
country.

era



No
one is
maintaining
the
facility

and
leaking
oil has
caused
major
spillage
throughout
the
site.

era



New
research
shows
that
salt

and
heavy
metals
coming
from
oil
exploration
and
production
have
contaminated
drinking
water
across
this
area,
putting
the
health
of
hundreds
of
thousands
of
people
at risk.

era



Local
opposition
soldiers
claim
an
armed
group
from
Sudan's
Darfur
region
ransacked
the
Thar
Jath
facility
in
early
2014.

era



Documents
from
the
company
SPOC
indicate
the
Thar
Jath
facility
was
ordered
by the
government
of

South
Sudan
to
cease
operations
by
August
7,
2013.

era



Papers
strewn
around
the
ransacked

company
offices
of
SPOC
contain
photographs
of oil
workers
before
the
plant
was
shut
down
and
abandoned
in late
2013.

era



Fighting
is
evident
at one
oil
well
feeding
the
central
processing
facility.
Live
and
spent
ammunitions
rust in
the hot
sun
where

locals
say
opposition
troops
fought
a
Darfur
militia
from
Sudan
in
early
2014.

era



Bullet

and
shrapnel
holes
can be
seen at
one
leaking
oil
well
near
Thar
Jath.

era



A
Nuer

opposition
rebel
with
his
weapon
at an
outpost
near
the
Thar
Jath
oilfield.
Fighting
between
the
dominant
Nuer
and
Dinka
tribes
has
raged
in the
world's
youngest
country
for 14
months.

era



Children
play in
mud
puddles
beside
Rier
town's
only
functioning
water
pump.
Salt
levels
in the
water
tested
from
this
pump

show
it is
undrinkable,
and
villagers
have
to use
water
from
the
swamps
and
river.

era



In Rier

market
at the
heart
of
rebel-held
territory,
there
is
almost
nothing
for
sale. It
is
difficult
for
supplies
to
reach
these
areas
from
government-held
sides.

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