



Takaaki Iwabu/Niagara Gazette

QUESTIONS: Teresa Hescox, left, and Dawn Sembert study a state report on cancer incidents in the Belden Center area of the Town of Niagara. They were among those attending a public availability session Tuesday at the Niagara Active Hose Fire Co.

Few health questions answered

FAILURE TO COMMUNICATE: *Belden Center residents find few health answers at public meetings.*

By Eugene W. Frett
Niagara Gazette

TOWN OF NIAGARA — The residents of Belden Center in the Town of Niagara want to know if their community is contaminated. They said they're still waiting for a definitive answer.

Meetings held Tuesday at the Niagara Active Hose Fire Co. at 4995 Lockport Road were meant to answer citizens questions about the Health Department study of the incidence of brain tumors in the Belden Center area.

Instead, the sessions highlighted communication problems between the various state and county officials and the people who live in the area.

On hand were state Senator George Maziarz, R-North Tonawanda, county Legislator Robert Villani, D-Town of

Niagara, along with representatives from the New York state Department of Health, state Department of Environmental Conservation and the Niagara County Health Department.

"You have a lot of people here but not a lot of them are talking to you. You say something and they come back with no answer, or an answer you can't understand," said Donna Sembert of Birch Avenue.

"I want it put in common language," she said. "The way they have things written out in here, the common person cannot understand that language or understand what it means."

"Thirty years ago, I used to play back there on the Carborundum site. We used to jump off the coal piles into blue and green fluorescent pools.

Carl and Dorothy Harris of Birch Avenue said they have four family members who have struggled with cancer.

"My son is still fighting it, I had it when I was younger, one of my daughters lost eight babies and another daughter lost two babies," Mrs. Harris said.

► ENVIRONMENT

Residents are asking why the state is testing just the dump sites.

"Go to the people's homes," said Teresa Hescox of Lincoln Street. "Knock on my door, take a sample, tell me it's not contaminated and I'll say, 'Thank you very much. I can sleep tonight.'"

The Belden Center residents who came to the early meeting complained that not only did they hand out a complicated technical report and fact sheets to lay people and tell them to analyze them and ask intelligent questions on the spot, but they asked them to do that in an unstructured free for all with twenty people talking at the same time.

The state study showed a higher number of brain cancers than expected but a single cause could not be determined, said Aura L. Weinstein, director of the Cancer Surveillance Program. Because of the uncertainty of the findings and the presence of known inactive hazardous waste disposal sites in the area, additional studies will be conducted, she said.