

State study of cancers expected to expand

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NIAGARA FALLS — A recent state health study of cancer cases in the Ransomville area over a five-year period will probably be expanded to include cases in the Lewiston-Porter area over 10 years.

County authorities still need to get the approval of Lewiston-Porter school officials, so that school faculty and students could be included, said Paulette Kline, Niagara County public health director.

"There's no new concern to warrant any more concern from the public," Kline said. "I just wanted a wider study to try to gather more data."

Kline said the expanded effort was not a new study, but part of the survey originally requested by former Rep. John J. LaFalce, D-Town of Tonawanda. So far, Kline said, the study has not proven any link between contamination and cancer in the so-called "toxic triangle" area of western Niagara County.

Still, residents of the area say it is long overdue and will help answer important questions.

"The Ransomville study was incomplete," said Bill Rolland, secretary of a group called Residents for Responsible Government, which represents 300 people in the towns of Porter and Lewiston. "Health authorities are finally realizing that this is a very contaminated area of the state."

The Ransomville study, which concluded last month, investigated the incidence of cancers contracted by residents in the 14131 ZIP code during the years 1995 to 1999.

The state report found that the total number of cancers diagnosed in men and boys was "significantly greater than the number expected."

The cancer numbers for women and girls "was not significantly different," the report concluded.

The Ransomville area was studied because it is "downwind" from the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works and the Niagara Falls Storage Site — a sprawling 700-acre

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area that was used as weapons research and manufacturing sites in the Manhattan Project development of atomic weapons during and after World War II. The Ransomville area also surrounds Chemical Waste Management's hazardous-waste landfill, the largest in the Northeast.

The ordnance works, storage site and CWM form the points of the toxic triangle that area residents fear has caused many cancer illnesses and deaths in the Lewiston-Porter district.

The expanded state study would cover cancer cases contracted from about 1992 to 2002 in and around those sites, Rolland surmised. State officials said they could not elaborate on the larger study until the geographic boundaries and study years have been determined.

The Ransomville study was also inconclusive because, out of "con-

cerns for privacy," it covered only seven of more than 100 types of cancer, said Ann Roberts, chairwoman of the Health Committee of Residents for Responsible Government.

"The most significant finding and the alarming trend is that 94 observed male cases were 34 percent above the expected male baseline," Roberts said.

"The Niagara Falls Storage Site is a crucial part of the whole hazardous waste concern in this area," Roberts said. "Half the world's mined radium is buried there."

Soil around the Lewiston-Porter school campus, meanwhile, is being tested for possibly dangerous contamination, which residents say also should have been done years ago.

"There has never been a comprehensive soil evaluation of the Lewiston-Porter campus," Roberts said. "And given the history of the area, it's long overdue."

Residential groups have long expressed concern about the radioactive residue and contaminated material that remained in the soil and water table at the ordnance and storage sites, which are about a mile from the Lewiston-Porter school campus and its 2,500 students.

Unexplained illnesses and deaths among former students and teachers over the years have raised questions in the community about a possible connection with the contaminated sites.

Several years ago, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers was given the task to clean up the contaminated World War II sites. But so far, cleanup operations has begun only at the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works. The 191-acre storage landfill, located within the overall ordnance site, only has been surveyed for contamination, Roberts said.

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