

# Cancer study: More questions than answers

**REPORT:** State officials mum, but local officials and residents speak out.

**BY CAITLIN MURRAY**

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A study released last week by the state Department of Health acknowledged what appeared to be elevated levels of some types of cancers in areas surrounding the former Lake Ontario Ordinance Works and the Niagara Falls Storage Site, but the report stopped short of attributing the anomalies to environmental

## IF YOU GO

■ **WHAT:** Public hearing on cancer study results

■ **WHEN:** 7 to 9 p.m. Monday

■ **WHERE:** Lewiston-Porter High School auditorium, 4061 Creek Road, Youngstown

■ **MORE INFO:** The 27-page report is downloadable at [www.health.state.ny.us](http://www.health.state.ny.us)

contamination.

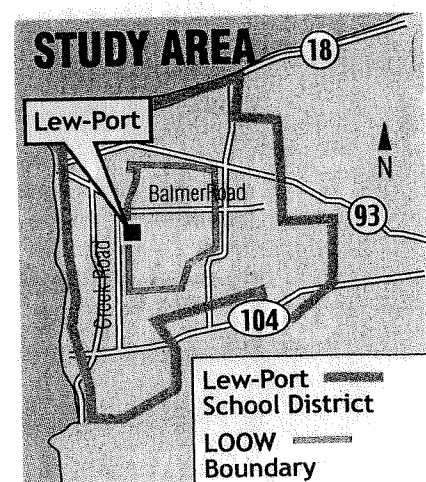
After repeated requests to speak to Department of Health

researchers, department spokesman Jeffrey Hammond said no one from the department would speak to the Niagara Gazette about the study and declined any further comment on the report. Researchers involved with the study will answer questions at a public hearing Monday night, he added.

## Elevated cancer instances

The study tracked cancer instances from 1991 through 2000 in three areas near the LOOW and NFSS sites, consisting of the Lewiston-Porter Central School District,

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the towns of Lewiston and Porter, Youngstown and Ransomville.

In study area No. 1, around the Lew-Port district, three cancers were found at "statistically significant excess" numbers. Breast cancer was the most common cancer found among women, with 193 cases observed compared to 162 cases expected based on statewide cancer rates. Bladder cancer was also determined to be high among women. In men, prostate cancer was most common, with 238 cases observed compared to 177 cases expected.

In the same study area, it was found that the number of cancers in children was "statistically significantly greater than expected," with an excess number of cancers of "germ cell, trophoblastic and other gonadal neoplasms."

But the report determined that proximity to the LOOW and NFSS sites cannot be pinpointed as the cause and that "the possibility that the occurrence of the cancers was the result of chance cannot be ruled out."

The report pointed to better medical screening for breast and prostate cancers as a likely explanation for the increase of those types of reported cancers in study area No. 1.

For bladder cancer, the report noted it is a common cancer among smokers, and between 1991 and 2000, for those women who were diagnosed with bladder cancer and whose smoking history could be determined, most were smokers or had been smokers.

In the case of high cancers among children, a small number had not yet reached school age when they were diagnosed but the majority were 5 years or older, with the greatest number being between 10 and 14 years old at a significantly higher-than-expected level. The

report, however, indicated "some" school-aged children did not attend school in Lew-Port, but the report did not say how many.

The report also said across all three study areas, most childhood cancers occurred in the Village of Lewiston, the most populated area of the study, and there was "no obvious concentration in the area around the LOOW and NFSS sites."

A press release of summary findings from the report stated, "More recent data show that after 2000, the unusual numbers of childhood cancers in general, and childhood gonadal and germ cell tumors in particular did not continue." But the report only covers 1999 through 2000 and data after 2000 is not provided in the report.

## Reaction to the report

For those in the study areas who spoke to the Gazette, the report didn't seem to ease any concerns.

"It's frustrating and inconclusive," said Lewiston-Porter school board member Keith Fox, who said he read the entire report. "It points out that there are these various things that are wrong in various areas, but it doesn't tell you why or how it happens or anything of that sort. And then it ends up saying it could be by chance."

Amy Witryol, an environmental activist in Lewiston, criticized the way information was presented within the report and the use of methods she called inconsistent.

Census tract data was used in study area No. 1, but zip code data was used for the other study areas in Ransomville and Youngstown, which led to parts of Cambria and Wilson being included in the study, she said. The LOOW

is located in the middle of Lewiston and Porter, and the inclusion of Cambria and Wilson could "mask significant problems" in affected areas.

"Unless and until the DOH produces the data it has already collected for each census tract for this study, we will not know the extent of significant problems in Youngstown and the Ransomville area of Porter," she said. "Clearly, how the DOH chose to present the data was selective. The community deserves full disclosure."

Witryol also questioned whether raw numbers provided proper context, arguing that Town of Porter, which is less than half the size of the Town of Lewiston, could have significantly elevated levels of some types of cancers.

Don Rappold, interim superintendent for the Lew-Port school district, told the Gazette he had "no reaction" to the report.

"We're interested to hear what the New York state Department of Health has to say," he said.

Lewiston Town Supervisor Fred Newlin said no matter what the report determines, the local government will advocate on behalf of town residents to hold the federal government, which is responsible for the LOOW and NFSS sites, accountable.

"In a lot of respects, this raises more questions than it gives us answers," Newlin said. "But my hope is that this public hearing will be very well attended by local citizens so they can ask the experts more detailed questions about this study, put their fears to rest and see if there are any further tests that can be done that might have a greater value."

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