



LEWISTON: State officials discuss cancer study

By Rick Ahrens
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— Experts from the New York State Department of Health and the Roswell Park Cancer Institute gathered at Lewiston-Porter High School Monday night to discuss the results of a study examining the incidence of cancer in northern Niagara County.

While the results did present evidence of increased cancer rates, some residents in attendance expected definitive information about cause and effect.

"The problem is that this meeting was not helpful to me as a parent," said Jean Lackban, a Lewiston mother with children in Lew-Port schools. "There was nothing to tell me if I should be concerned about the environment around the school."

"I came here and got wishy-washy census data," she added. "I wanted useful information about what is going on in my neighborhood."

The dissatisfaction was echoed among other attendees, though some saw the study as an improvement.

"We've been asking for a study like this for 25 years, but have always been told they couldn't get a small enough population size to focus on this neighborhood," said Nona McQuay, a 50-year resident of Lewiston who now lives in Cambria. "The fact that they've narrowed the population down to the size of towns and zip codes is a positive step."

Experts were careful to acknowledge those concerns, but pointed out that environmental issues were not the focus of the study.

"We're not saying that there are no environmental issues around here, but we're not the environmental guys," said Dr. Gregory Young, medical director for the Western Division of the State Department of Health.

"What we can do is tell you the incidence of cancer in your area," he said. "That's what this study does."

The study, which examined territories near the former Lake Ontario Ordnance Works and the Niagara Falls Storage Site in Lewiston, acknowledged the existence of statistically high rates of cancer in the area, but did not address issues of cause and effect.

The data in the study was pulled from the New York State Cancer Registry, and included all residents of three particular populations around the former waste sites that were diagnosed with cancer between 1990 and 2000.

The regions examined included the territory within the Lewiston-Porter school district, Youngstown, and Ransomville. The areas are downwind, downstream, or at a lower elevation from the waste sites, which increases the possibility of exposure to hazardous substances.

The study found a statistically high rate of cancers among males in the Lew-Port school district, meaning the number of cancer diagnoses exceeded the expected number by a margin outside the realm of chance. Female rates were not high enough to rule out chance.

The results in Youngstown and Ransomville did not yield statistically high rates of cancer diagnoses. However, the incidence of prostate cancer among males was statistically greater than all other types of cancer within that population.

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Photos



080929 Cancer hearing2/nfg DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER Lewiston - Aura Weinstein of the New York State Department of Health Cancer Surveillance Program speaks about the finding of study linking high cancer rates in the Lewiston area. A small crowd attend the presentation at the Lew-Port High Auditorium.



080929 Cancer hearing3/nfg DAN CAPPELLAZZO/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER Lewiston - A small crowd listens to a presentation by the New York State Department of Health Cancer Surveillance Program at the Lew-Port High Auditorium and their findings on a study linking high cancer rates in the Lewiston area.