

TOWN OF TONAWANDA

Study finds more cancer cases than expected

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The incidence of cancer in the neighborhoods surrounding a Town of Tonawanda site where the federal government dumped radioactive waste during World War II is "statistically significantly more than the number of cases expected," according to a state Department of Health study released Thursday.

The study of people diagnosed with cancer from 1994 to 1998 revealed that the number of colorectal cancer cases in males was "significantly more than expected," and in females, "statistically significant excesses" were found in the number of colorectal, breast and thyroid cancers.

"It's about 10 percent (higher)," said [redacted] director of the Cancer Surveillance Program for the health

department. "A difference of this size is not likely due to chance."

Health officials found that in the 14150 and 14217 ZIP codes, there were 1,197 males with cancer, compared with the 1,084 expected to have cancer, based on standard cancer-incidence rates by age and sex for New York State outside of New York City.

[redacted] said female cancer rates were found to be 1,201 cases versus the 1,101 cases that were expected.

There were 169 colorectal cancer cases in both men and women, compared with 135 and 143 respective cases that were expected, officials said. [redacted] and other nervous system cancers in men and breast, thyroid and uterine cancer in women were also above expected levels.

[redacted] cautioned that the statistics do not take into account heredity, occupational exposures or diet.

"This study is not capable of proving

any cause-and-effect relationship," she said. "We don't know whether any of these people with cancer were exposed to anything from the Linde site."

Weinstein also pointed out cancers of the cervix along with the kidney and pelvic areas in women were actually lower than the health department expected.

Nevertheless, health department officials said they will pursue additional studies over a longer time frame in the neighborhoods immediately surrounding the site. The results of those studies are expected sometime next year, officials said.

Area politicians, including Erie County Legislator [redacted] D-Kenmore, and Republican Town Councilman [redacted] criticized state health officials for what they believed to be a failure to notify residents about Thursday's meeting.

The meeting, in the cafeteria of the

Holmes Elementary School, was sparsely attended. "It's a sham as far as I'm concerned. People should be notified," Rider said. "You can't have a public meeting without the public."

[redacted] told health officials that more than just the news media should be notified, and that they should consider scheduling such meetings away from the holiday period and in a different location to ensure that all residents interested in the issue can attend.

Health department officials promised a better effort to notify residents.

In the subsequent study, Swanick suggested health department officials also take a look at other areas in the town, including the "Mud Flats" near the Youngmann Highway and the town's nearby landfill.

Health officials were noncommittal about Swanick's suggestion.

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