

Love Canal 30th Anniversary Report: NYS Department of Health's Final Whitewash

Report Summary

Center for Health, Environment & Justice, August 2008

The New York State Department of Health (DOH) will soon be releasing the Follow-up Love Canal Health Study which evaluates a small number of health outcomes in 6,181 Love Canal residents. The study found serious adverse health effects despite an inherently flawed study design that biases results towards underestimating health outcomes.

Critically Flawed DOH Study

- Study does not include many residents, only those who filled out questionnaires or were interviewed in 1978. DOH makes no effort to estimate what percentage of residents was included nor do they fully acknowledge this flaw.
- Study used extremely limited state Birth Defect Registry which was not established until 1983, five years *after* the DOH ordered relocations. Of the 700 plus families who lived there, all but 67 families had moved out by 1982, so birth defects that occurred during the height of the Love Canal tragedy are not included. It did not include previous studies that showed significant birth defects, such as one that found 56% of the children were born with a birth defect from 1974 to 1978.
- Study used limited state Cancer Registry which was not established until 1979. Several cancer clusters were not included as they occurred before the registry began. The registry also does not include residents who moved out of state. DOH estimated up to 868 of the 6,181 participants moved out of state or 14% of the community.
- DOH did not conduct a health survey, nor did they collect health data directly from the residents. The agency ignored the community's many requests to conduct health interviews, and instead used inadequate data from state databases on only a few health problems of only a portion of people affected by the Love Canal toxic waste site.

Elevated Birth Defects and Cancer Found in Love Canal Community

In spite of these serious study design flaws, the DOH study found the following negative health outcomes for Love Canal residents.

- ▶ The rate of birth defects (congenital malformations) in residents was elevated compared to two comparison groups. Children born at Love Canal were twice as likely as other Niagara County children to be born with a birth defect. Children were at higher risk of having low birth weight, pre-term births and were small for gestational age. Children were twice as likely to be female.
- ▶ Increased rates of cancer of the kidney, bladder, and lungs were found among residents.

The Department of Health's mandate is to protect public health, which includes providing information that helps people take personal actions to prevent disease. The people who lived through the Love Canal toxic tragedy need to know what their risks are and what they might expect for their children. The agency should alert former and current residents of the adverse health effects found in the study, including increased rates of birth defects and higher than expected rates of kidney and bladder cancer.