

Attorneys claim they have cancer cluster culprit: benzaldehyde

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Attorneys for the families of victims of the local cancer cluster believe they have discovered the cause of the cluster that has sickened more than 20 children.

Sampling of dust in attics at the Clyde homes where children with cancer lived showed elevated levels of benzaldehyde, a substance emitted during the process of making appliances, said Alan Mortensen, a Salt Lake City, Utah, attorney representing the families.

This is the first time anyone has been able to link a common denominator between the families whose children were sickened with cancer, Mortensen said.

"We did a control sample in western Sandusky County, and there was no benzaldehyde," he said during a news conference today in Toledo. "As it stands right now, we're confident that the benzaldehyde caused the cancer cluster."

Whirlpool Corp. is responsible for the chemical being released into the air, Mortensen and the families said. They filed a class-action lawsuit against the company on Tuesday, alleging it is responsible for the benzaldehyde and caused the Eastern Sandusky County Cancer Cluster.

In addition, investigators working for the families and their attorneys found high rates of cancer among adults and developmental issues among some children who lived near the contaminated former Whirlpool Park outside of Green Springs.

Whirlpool operated the popular park, which had a swimming pool and basketball and tennis courts, until 2006. Last year, toxic sludge was found buried beneath the basketball court.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency found the sludge after receiving tips that Whirlpool had dumped substances there. Whirlpool denies dumping on the property.

Mortensen said he is not sure whether the cancers at the park and the cancers among children are connected, although he said both show a disregard for public health and safety on Whirlpool's part.

"We will vigorously defend Whirlpool, its employees, and the community against these allegations," Whirlpool spokeswoman Kristine Vernier said in a statement Tuesday.

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Abstract (Document Summary)

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