

Greenwire September 22, 2005 Thursday

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**SECTION:** SPOTLIGHT Vol. 10 No. 9**LENGTH:** 515 words**HEADLINE:** NEVADA: EPA study shows town has normal cancer rates despite arsenic contamination**BODY:**

A U.S. EPA study of 905 Fallon, Nev., residents released yesterday did not reveal high cancer rates -- despite high levels of naturally growing arsenic in the area for years. Fallon has a higher-than-normal rate of childhood leukemia cases, and for years scientists have tried to determine the reasons behind the 16 cases of acute lymphocytic leukemia since 1997 in the town, an agricultural community with about 8,300 residents. The typical childhood cancer rate is about three children per 100,000. The results of the study will be valuable "even though we don't have any earth-shattering news to tell you about how bad arsenic is for you," said EPA official Rebecca Calderon (AP/Las Vegas Sun, Sept. 21). The study, which focused on arsenic contamination in drinking water, was conducted in August and September of 2002. Researchers found no link between low-level arsenic exposure and adverse health effects (Josh Johnson, Lohontan Valley News, Sept. 22). Fallon Mayor Ken Tedford, who participated in the study, said city officials asked for many years for research to be done on Fallon regarding arsenic contamination. In 1997, Tedford wrote 80 members of Congress asking that the city be studied for potential health implications from arsenic in the water supply. Last year, a team of scientists financed by the Gerber Foundation launched a research project to determine whether air pollutants could be a cause of the illnesses. Under the Gerber Foundation-backed project, scientists at the University of Arizona set up air sampling units to search for heavy metals, such as tungsten.

Fallon has far higher levels of tungsten in its drinking water than its surrounding cities. As many as a dozen tungsten mines have operated in Churchill County, where Fallon is located. And Nevada environmental regulators exempted a tungsten ore refinery kiln in Fallon from air pollution controls for nearly 20 years. But while residents have speculated on several possibilities, scientists have not been able to come to any conclusions. Some environmentalists have blamed Fallon's municipal water supply, which contains naturally occurring arsenic up to 100 parts per billion, 10 times the U.S. EPA standard. Fallon has spent more than \$16 million to correct this problem. The families of some victims have said a nearby 45-year-old jet fuel pipeline, owned by Kinder Morgan, could be responsible for the illnesses. In 2003, a study of Fallon's tree core samples turned up certain chemicals found in jet fuel. But state and federal environmental investigators have said the jet fuel pipeline, which runs across the desert to the Fallon Naval Air Station, is not the cause of any contamination. Complicating research into Fallon's cancer cases is the fact that Nevada's birth defects registry, which had operated for three years under a federal start-up grant, ended in 2002 after the state did not properly follow federal grant renewal regulations. The registry, which collected data on children from birth to age seven, sought to identify trends in birth defects (Greenwire, June 18, 2004). -- RLG

**LOAD-DATE:** September 22, 2005