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- NATION/WORLD
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- SPORTS
- ENTERTAINMENT
- OPINION
- COLUMNS
- NIE ONLINE
- WEATHER
- HURRICANES
- FLOYD AFTERMATH
- CLASSIFIEDS
- EMPLOYMENT
- AUTOMOTIVE
- REAL ESTATE
- OTHER
- HOMEPLACE
- SUBMIT AN AD
- OF INTEREST
- OBITUARIES
- AREA HAPPENINGS
- AREA BRIEFS
- BLOTTER
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- MESSAGE BOARDS
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- USA WEEKEND
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WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 13, 1999

Ex-base residents sought for info on toxic exposure

BY ROCHELLE CONVERSE
DAILY NEWS STAFF

An agency affiliated with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is planning a study to determine if families who lived aboard Camp Lejeune between 1968 and 1985 were adversely affected by cleaning chemicals released into the water supply.

The Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry, a part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, has already identified 12,500 people who were either born or conceived during that time and lived at Tarawa Terrace or Hospital Point, where the chemicals were released into the water systems in the early 1980s.

"What we're doing is attempting to locate and survey these families," said Kathy Skipper, chief of public affairs for the agency. "It's to determine what type of health issues people have had if they were born or conceived at Camp Lejeune during that time.

"The most important thing is to determine if this population is experiencing any adverse health effects."

The chemicals originated from an off-base dry cleaner, located across the street from Camp Lejeune, where trichloroethylene (TCE), tetrachloroethylene (PCE) and dichloroethylene were released into the groundwater and traveled into the base water systems, Skipper said.

The contaminated site at ABC One-Hour

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Cleaners, at 2127 Lejeune Blvd., made the Environmental Protection Agency's National Priorities List - commonly known as the Superfund list - in 1989 after being linked to the 1985 well contamination on base. The 12 effected well sites were closed in 1985.

During that time, the owners of ABC said they were unaware of the damages caused by dumping the cleaning fluids behind their store.

So far, studies involving TCE and PCE are limited and health officials are still trying to determine how they may affect human health. TCE, however, has been linked to childhood leukemia in some cases, she said.

"These are compounds associated with adverse pregnancy outcomes," Skipper said. "Obviously, it's something that people who lived at Camp Lejeune need to be aware of. We don't want to scare them but we certainly want to identify people who lived there and that they will want to participate."

A small-scale study completed in 1998 by ATSDR found that children, primarily boys, born to mothers who lived at the Camp Lejeune housing sites during the 1980s were smaller in size because of exposure to TCE.

In addition, the infants of mothers age 35 or older or mothers who had a history of infant or fetal death had an increased rate of low-birth weight as a result of being exposed to PCE, Skipper said.

The current study, estimated to take a year, is broader and will have more open-ended questions to determine if any health problems may be linked to exposure to the chemicals.

The study is focusing primarily on people who were born or conceived because health officials believe children are more vulnerable to the chemicals than adults.

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~~"We are most sensitive before we're actually~~
born," Skipper said. "That is when people are most sensitive to these chemicals. The rationale is, most people are most vulnerable when they're in vitro."

The primary chemical involved in the incident was TCE, a degreaser or chemical cleaner. PCE is commonly used as a dry cleaning solution.

ABC One-Hour Cleaners designation as a Superfund site has directed two types of cleanup at the cleaner's location. The process of cleaning groundwater is still under way and is estimated to take seven more years to complete, said Luis Flores, EPA project manager for the site.

Groundwater will be pumped and treated but is not currently used as drinking water, he said.

The second cleanup project will include a vapor extraction process of the contaminated soil where air will be pumped into the soil and chemical particles will be captured. The soil extraction is estimated to begin next year and should take one year to complete.

"The contaminated soil is basically under the building," Flores said.

Superfund sites receive money from a federal tax on the production and sale of hazardous chemicals and is used to pay for environmental cleanups when businesses or people cannot afford to do so.

"We've had a number of calls from people who received calls from ATSDR and are concerned about this," said Maj. Scott Fazekas, deputy public affairs officer at Camp Lejeune. "We are very concerned about it and we want to give people as much information as we can."

A host of information regarding the chemicals is available for family members through the

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ATSDR, which can be reached at 888-42 ATSDR.
~~Camp Lejeune is also offering information and~~
can be reached toll free at 877-261-9782.

Anyone who lived at one of the housing locations
between 1968 and 1985 or knows of someone
who did is encouraged to call 800-639-4270 to
become a part of the study, which is being
conducted by the National Opinion Research
Center.

Rochelle Converse can be contacted by e-mail
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^BACK TO TOP^

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