



STATE OF WEST VIRGINIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN RESOURCES

Joe Manchin III
Governor

Martha Yeager Walker
Secretary

August 19, 2005

Charlotte Hutchens, Superintendent
Raleigh County Schools
105 Adair Street
Beckley, West Virginia 25801

Dear Ms. Hutchens:

Based on the concerns raised by community members, the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Bureau for Public Health, Division of Surveillance and Disease Control reviewed health data for persons residing in the area of Marsh Fork Elementary School. The following summarizes the findings to date:

1. Cancer: The types of cancers seen in persons living in the Marsh Fork area (Zip Code 25140) are those typically seen throughout West Virginia. Although the number of cases may be slightly above that which would be expected (by less than one case per year), this appears to be associated with the age structure of the population (median age of 41.0 compared to a median age for West Virginia of 38.9 years). Although there have been two cancers reported in adolescents residing in the Marsh Fork area since 1993, neither of these are cancers typically seen when there is concern about a cancer cluster related to environmental pollution.
2. Concerns raised by community members: Bo Webb provided questionnaires addressing health concerns. It should be noted that the Bureau for Public Health has no knowledge of the survey methodology (e.g., the number of surveys distributed, to whom and how they were distributed, etc.) and has concerns about the reliability and validity of the survey instrument based on wording of the questions. However, the Bureau did, to the extent possible, analyze the results and found that more than half (28 of 48; 58.3%) report respiratory concerns (asthma, bronchitis, allergies or non-specific breathing problems); 17.5% (7 of 40) report concerns about headaches; and 12.5% (5 of 40) report concerns about nausea or non-specific stomach problems. However, because of the way the survey

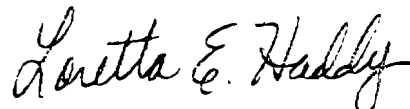
Bureau for Public Health
Division of Surveillance and Disease Control
Room 125, 350 Capitol Street
Charleston, West Virginia 25301-3715
(304) 558-5358 or 1-800-423-1271

was conducted and the wording of the questions, it is not possible to generalize from the survey to the school population as a whole. Thus the rates of these health concerns among Marsh Fork children and whether those rates exceed those which would be expected in a similar group of children not exposed to the coal prep plant remain unknown

3. Physician reports: Mr. Wiley, another community member, provided the names of two physicians, Dr. Michael Kostenko and Dr. Carlos Lucero. Dr. Kostenko has worked primarily with Workers Compensation claims and reported no direct knowledge of the health of the Marsh Fork children. Dr. Lucero reported one or two children with symptoms of allergies but who responded to no specific allergens, four or five children between the ages of 3 and 6 years who were diagnosed with learning disabilities and two children with persistent rashes. However, he stated that he believed the problems were being caused by mercury emissions from power plants and dioxins transmitted via the air from the Charleston area.

Be assured that the health of West Virginia's children is of great concern to Governor Manchin's administration. The Bureau for Public Health staff will continue to monitor this situation based on data that are available and will update you and Secretary Martha Yeager Walker should any changes occur. We would also be pleased to review any additional information provided, should you so desire. Please feel free to contact me should you have any questions about this letter or any further concerns.

Sincerely,



Loretta E. Haddy, Ph.D.
State Epidemiologist

cc: Martha Yeager Walker
Chris Curtis
Carte Goodwin ✓
Bill Elswick