

Meeting

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New York State Health Department representatives will bring a comprehensive fact sheet about how cancer occurs, as well as information about past testing and cleanup efforts at Southside and LaFrance, said spokeswoman Catherine Pospisil. They also will explain what options are available for following up on the meeting.

"The most major concern is that students are afraid to go to school," Kump said. "We'll specifically be addressing the safety of attending the school."

Gilberto Torres Cuevas, whose stepdaughter Natalie Resio found out she had leukemia soon after she graduated from Southside in 1997, is worried about the safety of another daughter, middle-grader Grace Torres.

"I want them to do something about it," he said.

"I'm looking for answers, not only for me but for everybody in the school."

School board President Deborah Pierce praised such as students Resio who have weathered cancer, and said she wants to be sure at the meeting that anyone who needs support is getting it.

"The children have been extremely forthcoming and brave in sharing this experience and supporting each other," she said.

Many school board members, City Council members and county legislators plan to attend Tuesday's meeting. City Councilman Dan Royle, D-5th, is concerned about members of his family and residents of his district.

"I put three kids through school there and have one more coming," he said. "Like everyone else, I want to know that my son is going to be safe."

Royle also said he wants to learn more about the tanks that were under the school, the scope of the resulting plume of oil, and the effect of the contamination on children.

He said the investigation should expand from the school into the community, examining cancers in the neighborhood, related diseases and cancer among people who graduated or retired from Southside many years ago.

Julie Patros, whose son Tom graduated in 1997 and has testicular cancer, has contacted Lois Gibbs, a mother who became a leading activist in revealing extensive chemical wastes beneath a large neighborhood in Love Canal, N.Y., in 1978. Gibbs is now executive director of the Center for Health, Environment and Justice, which advises grass-roots community groups on how to fight environmental threats. Patros said she hopes Gibbs can act as a mediator for concerned citizens in Elmira and Southport.

There are many of them. Sue Phillips lives on Hampton Road near Miller's Pond, which was likely contaminated by the same fuel oil that leaked from underground storage tanks on the Southside property, according to conservation department officials.

Phillips wants to find out more about how the chemicals are absorbed by the body. "My son is forever making mud pies," she said. "He runs around without socks and shoes. Kids eat dirt. Is he being exposed?"

Royle cautions that whatever the panel of experts reveals, this meeting is only the first step in a process. "I suspect that at the end of this meeting there will still be questions on people's minds," he said. "This meeting won't be the end of it."

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