

Sunday  
May 7  
2000

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### Editorial

## Probe — phase 2

■ Our view: Officials, residents must press for information about Southside contamination.

About 400 people heard health and environmental officials say Tuesday that, from what they now know, Southside High School does not pose a health hazard.

The finding, though based on a first round of tests, brought some calm to what could have been a panic situation. Despite the anxiety among many parents at the meeting, they conducted themselves with remarkable reserve, especially the ones whose children have cancer or have other unusual illnesses.

However, as the community waits for the state to conduct more tests at the school, residents must be constantly informed about the progress of the state's investigation. That means:

■ The state Health Department should provide regular feedback about how its cancer surveillance efforts are progressing in trying to explain to school district residents any relationship between the environment and reports of 13 cancer cases among current and former Southside High School students in the past three years.

■ The Department of Environmental Conservation should release as quickly as possible results of future tests it does, not just at Southside but in the surrounding neighborhoods.

State officials said last week that it was impractical for them to test the greater Southside area, but they did tell parents they would work with them on specific concerns.

Andy Carlson of the Health Department told a mother worried about her child's strange illness — not cancer — the department might investigate after talking with the child's doctor.

Such offers of help should not be ignored by the community. Since the Health Department has made Southside a top priority, parents concerned about their children's health should take up the agency on its offer of help. No question or concern should be considered too trivial to bring to the department's attention.

The same holds true for the Department of Environmental Conservation, an agency that plans to continue testing at the school and nearby Miller Pond, where spilled fuel oil from tanks once buried under Southside High property has surfaced in recent years.

As with any public health issue, the public's worst enemy is complacency. Despite reassurances at last Tuesday's meeting, no one should consider this case heading for closure. The school board meets Tuesday for the first time since the issue broke in April. Members should spend a lot of time talking about what's next.

For instance, they should make sure that Southside High School students will have plenty of opportunities to learn more about this issue.

Sessions, such as the one planned for Southside students at 3 p.m. Thursday, will give them a chance to ask health and environmental representatives about the current and past contamination at and around the school site.

As officials said at last Tuesday's meeting, this is just a start, and no one should be satisfied until all the possible concerns regarding the Southside illnesses are answered.

**For help**

State health and environmental conservation officials recommended the following contacts for people who need or want to provide more information regarding the cancer concern at Southside High School.

■ **HEALTH CONCERNS:**  
Dawn Heltrick, assistant sanitary engineer, 800/458-1158, ext. 27860.  
Mark VanDusen, outreach coordinator, 800/458-1158, ext. 27530.  
Both work for the state Health Department.

■ **CANCER CONCERNS:**  
Aure Weinstein, director, cancer surveillance program, 518/474-0244.

■ **MILLER POND/FORMER REMINGTON ROAD OIL SPILL:** Scott Rodabaugh, state Department of Environmental Conservation, 607/739-6300.

■ **FORMER AMERICAN LAFRANCE CLEANUP:**  
M.D. Mehta, DEC office in Avon, 716/228-5384.  
Meagher Boice-Creen, DEC in Avon, 716/228-6329.

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Fri, Mar 29, 2019