

# Southside: County tally exceeds state's

Continued from Page 1A

completed; however, many of the addresses are old and could be outdated, Elmira schools superintendent Laura Sherwood said.

The district might recruit the assistance of a company that publishes alumni directories to track down graduates who have moved out of the area.

This could improve the thoroughness of the state's investigation, said Andy Carlson, director of the health department's Bureau of Environmental Exposure and Investigation.

"You need a lot of data so there's meaning in what you find," Carlson told committee members and about a dozen Southside parents and residents Monday.

When dealing with small numbers, an addition of one case in a given year could inflate the percentages dramatically. For example, if there are two cases of leukemia in one year and three

the next, that is a 50 percent increase. Those percentages could distort the problem when they are compared to the average for the entire state.

"I hate to say it, but it's all about numbers," Carlson said of the health department's investigation.

The state has invested hundreds of hours and more than \$500,000 in trying to determine whether there is an elevated rate of cancer among Southside students, and whether there are links between the cancer rate and environmental contamination at the school.

In August, state health officials reported that the 22 confirmed cancer cases among Southside students and alumni are fewer than the 48 cases that would normally occur during a 20-year period.

However, state officials said the number of testicular cancer cases among Southside students since 1997 is unusually high. At least four Southside students and alumni have devel-

oped the disease, according to information collected by the Star-Gazette.

While testicular cancer is one of the most common cancers among teen males, only four out of 100,000 American males are found to have the cancer each year, according to the American Medical Association.

Because of the state's confidentiality laws, the health department cannot give a specific number of cases because it is fewer than six, Metzger said.

"(The Southside investigation) has gone well beyond what we normally do and in a very short time frame," Weinstein said. "The finding of testicular cancer raised concern among us — that mixed with the known contamination at the school and at the property next door."

Weinstein said the state's investigations do not usually conclude with a known cause and effect. Their goal, she said, is "to assure ourselves that we looked as hard as we could at every possible lead."

## What's next

■ An informal question-and-answer session with state environmental and health officials about contamination at the former American LaFrance property on South Main Street will be held from 3:30 to 6:30 p.m. Dec. 5 at the Southport Fire Department, 1001 Carl St.

■ The Southside Advisory Committee will meet at 6 p.m. Dec. 11 in Room 104 at Southside High School, 777 S. Main St. Topics to be discussed include an environmental report on McNaught Field, review of the state's investigation by two independent environmental firms and a presentation on the committee's newly formed technical assistance team.

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