

# Health scare spurs talk of quitting area

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Residents of a Sarnia native community believe it's time to pack up and leave in the wake of growing health concerns in their area.

"Some say we should get out of here. Other ones say 'No, we should stay, fight for what is ours and our rights,'" Ada Lockridge, a member of the Aamjiwnaang First Nation near Sarnia, said yesterday.



Lockridge is co-author of a study reported in the Environmental Health Perspectives Journal this week, which found twice as many girls as boys are being born in the native community.

The study's authors are asking for a wider investigation because of concern the gender imbalance may be triggered by environmental contamination.

"The study has raised more questions. What is our dirt like down here, what are we breathing on a daily basis?" said Lockridge.

The native community is in the shadow of Sarnia's Chemical Valley, a string of

petrochemical plants along the St. Clair River.

The normal birth rate ratio in Canada is 51.2 per cent males and 48.8 per cent females.

On the Aamjiwnaang First Nation, only 34.8 per cent of the births were males from 1999 through 2003.

It was a phone conversation with biologist Michael Gilbertson, who's studied chemical contamination in the Great Lakes, that triggered the sex-ratio study, Lockridge said.

Gilbertson asked if people in the community had noticed any change in the number of boys and girls being born.

"One guy said we have had three girls' baseball teams and just one boys'; that put a seed in our head and got us thinking," said Lockridge.

The study notes there is as yet no direct evidence linking the sex-ratio decline to environmental exposures, but at the same time it suggests there's strong circumstantial evidence there may be a connection.

The Great Lakes area has experienced declines in wildlife populations due to hormone-disrupting chemicals .