



GLENN OGILVIE The Observer

Wilson Plain Sr., left, his granddaughter Jessie and his son Wilson Jr. volunteered to be tested for chemicals as part of a national study on toxic chemicals.

Local family featured in study on chemicals

By CATHY DOBSON
The Observer

Three generations of an Aamjiwnaang family are featured in a national study on toxic chemicals to be released in Ottawa Thursday. Polluted Children, Toxic Nation is a report on pollution in Canadian families and was prepared by Environmental Defence, a non-profit advocacy group that wants the federal government to make Great Lakes pollution a key priority.

Wilson Plain Sr., 66, of Sarnia, his son Wilson Plain Jr., 44, and granddaughter Jessie, 4, volunteered to be among 33 Canadians who were tested for 68 chemicals in their blood and urine.

Plain Jr. and a woman from Montreal proved to carry the greatest number of chemicals in their system, each testing positive for 36 of the 68 studied.

"All seven children and all 19 adults in our study had toxic chemicals," said Environmental Defence spokesperson Jennifer Foulds.

"This is not a rigorous analysis but it shows everyone is polluted to some degree." Test subjects had a range of 7 to 36 chemicals present in their bodies.

Environmental Defence conducted the study in order to provide input on an ongoing review of the Canadian Environmental Protection Act.

There are many chemicals on the market in Canada that have not been sufficiently tested for public safety, Foulds said. "The reality is chemicals can go on the market before they are deemed safe."

Her group wants the act to force industry to take greater responsibility for thorough testing.

"As individuals, we don't have a lot of control over the air we breathe, the water we drink or the products we consume. That's the job of government and industry."

The study is part of a larger campaign to change the act, which has existed since 1988 and must be reviewed every five years.

The Great Lakes basin is home to 45 per cent of all toxic air pollutants in Canada, according to Foulds.

"It's a hot spot for pollution and we want changes made to address that," she said.

Environmental Defence is holding a press conference to release the study results on Parliament Hill Thursday. Until then, details of the report can't be published.

The advocacy group also plans a public meeting for the Aamjiwnaang First Nation at 6 p.m. on June 6 so the community can discuss the study's key findings.

The Plain family lives in a region of considerable national interest, Foulds said. "There's been a lot of attention related to health and pollutants there so we wanted to speak directly to the community about the results."

In addition to testing the three members of the Plain family, two other Sarnia residents were also tested during the course of the study.

Sandy Kinart, who lost her husband Blayne to mesothelioma, and her adult daughter were participants but their results were not included in the final report.

"We wanted to focus on children and pollution within a family," Foulds said. "But the Kinarts wanted to be tested, so they were."

The public will be provided details of the Kinarts' test results in a separate press event later next week.

For more information about Environmental Defence and its chemical toxin studies, log on to: toxienation.ca or environmentaldefence.ca.

The Observer
Thursday, June 1 2006
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Thousands to be checked for chemicals

By CATHY DOBSON
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The first-ever national bio-monitoring survey by the Canadian government will start next winter, says a Health Canada spokesman, responding to criticism levelled today by Environmental Defence.

Five thousands Canadians aged six to 79 years will be tested for about 70 environmental chemicals such as lead, mercury, phthalates and pesticides, said Health Canada's Carolyn Sexauer.

"This survey will produce statistically valid data on Canadians' exposure to environmental chemicals," she said. "The government of Canada takes very seriously the exposure of Canadians to environmental chemicals, the extent to which these substances are ending up in our bodies, and the risks they pose to our health."

The federal government was taken to task today by Environmental Defence, a non-profit advocacy group that released the results of a bio-monitoring study it conducted this year.

Only 13 people participated in Environmental Defence's study, not enough to be statistically significant but enough to demonstrate that Canadians, young and old, carry hundreds of different pollutants, said Rick Smith, a biologist and executive director of the Toronto-based group.

"It doesn't matter where you live, how old you are, it doesn't matter how clean living you are or if you eat organic food, we all are accumulating these things," he said.

He called on parents to urge the government to insist on better safety standards before chemical products are allowed on the market and to ban others.

In Environmental Defence's study, children as young as 10 harbored toxic chemicals in their urine and blood.

"We need to aggressively demand immediate action on the worst cancer-causing chemicals like flame retardants and phthalates (chemicals that make plastic soft)," Smith said. "Other countries have already banned them or are on their way to banning them."

Polybrominated diphenyl ethers (PBDEs) that are used in flame retardants are not found in high levels in the environment but there are signs they are increasing in our bodies and are slow to break down, Sexauer said.

So, while the government doesn't acknowledge PBDEs pose a human health risk, it's taking a "preventive approach," she said. That includes a possible ban and steps to ensure the "sound disposal" of existing waste containing these chemicals.

"At least one major manufacturer has recently stopped production of some PBDEs," Sexauer said without naming which one.

No final regulatory decision has been made yet, but Environment Canada and Health Canada are doing a review.

The government has a new chemicals program, according to Sexauer, that requires all chemicals to be assessed prior to their use in Canada.

While Smith said Canada has a "dismal" safety standard when it comes to chemicals, Sexauer said Canada's existing chemicals program is one of the most advanced in the world.

New chemicals on the market have to meet more stringent standards, Smith agreed. "But what about all the ones that have been on the market since the 60s?"

"There's thousands of those out there that were never tested."

That's why the Canadian Environmental Protection Act is up for parliamentary review, said Sexauer.