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Lawsuit Claims City of Blackwell Polluted By Old Zinc Smelter

posted 11:13 am Tue April 15, 2008 - Blackwell

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A lawsuit filed Monday says an entire Oklahoma town is being poisoned.

The class-action suit was filed on behalf of seven-thousand people in the town of Blackwell. That's about 90 miles northwest of Tulsa in Kay County.

The lawsuit claims a zinc smelter that closed in 1974 left behind toxic waste, contaminating the city. It says 90-percent of the homes in Blackwell have arsenic levels higher than standards set by the Environmental Protection Agency and that three-quarters had lead dust and 30-percent of children have enough lead in their blood to cause brain damage.

They're taking chunks out of Darlene Becker's yard as part of a soil test.

"I think it's lead and something that causes leukemia. There's a lot of people sick in this town. It's an old town."

Darlene moved to Blackwell 18 years ago after her home in Ponca City was bought out because of oil contamination. But according to the 40-page lawsuit, her new hometown of Blackwell may not be any better. The lawsuit says 58-million pounds of toxic waste -- lead, arsenic, cadmium, and zinc -- were left behind when the zinc smelter closed.

We spoke to two of the defendants in the lawsuit by phone. The Blackwell Industrial Authority says they haven't seen any data showing that level of contamination, but say they are quote "...committed to safety of citizens and environment. They maintain an open mind if data is available that indicates there's a problem."

Defendant Phelps Dodge is doing free soil sampling and property clean up as needed. Spokesman Steve Lewis says quote "they have been working ten years with residents, federal and state environmental authorities to clean up Blackwell".



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"If there's something wrong here that's going to make me sick, I want to know it," Becker says.

Darlene signed up for the free soil test. She says she'll wait for the facts.

"If something's wrong, they'll find it," she says. "And if they do, I'll move."

The defendants in the lawsuit say they will read over it and file their responses in court. But, they say they will also continue doing what they've been doing for the last ten years, offering free soil sampling and free cleanup as needed.

The lawsuit demands cleanup of all contaminated property, reimbursement of damage to property values and to keep close watch of the health of everyone in Blackwell.

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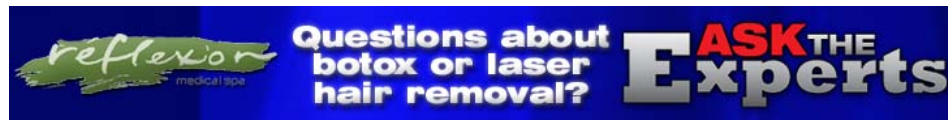
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