



THE PONCA CITY NEWS

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Blackwell Lead, Arsenic Test Results Send Many Residents To Vis

BY SHARON ROWEN

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BLACKWELL —Blackwell residents concerned with test results showing high levels of lead and arsenic in Blackwell topsoil visited with attorneys Tuesday.

Attorney Keith Langston said at least 20 residents had stopped by the VFW within a two- hour span.

"We are educating people and signing them up to be clients," said Langston.

"We are here to represent anyone who thinks they have a problem resulting from the by products of the smelter."

He explained that any legal action taken will not be a class action suit but instead individual lawsuits against Phelps Dodge including personal injury, property damage, and health problems.

Langston said that when residents sign up to be clients, testing on their property and possible medical tests could be conducted.

The situation came about after an environmental team hired by attorneys visited Blackwell in December from College Station, Texas.

The team visited between 40 and 50 homes in 23 zones of Blackwell and conducted various tests including soil samples outside the homes, addit dust samples, water samples from bathrooms and kitchens, dust layers from window seals, carpet dirt samples, and air filter dust.

"The team picked two houses in each zone," said

Langston.

"One built prior to 1974 and one built after 1974. Results showed that approximately 80 percent of the homes, old and new, have lead contamination, which should be a fair representation of the town. Arsenic showed up in 65-75 percent of the homes tested."

Langston expressed major concern over the amounts of lead discovered and described the levels found in one home as "through the roof"

"Lead is the big issue," he said. "It seriously affects small children and the brain and central nervous system development."

According to the Oklahoma State Department of Health Web site, lead poisoning left untreated can damage many internal organs. It can also lead to developmental problems, lower I.Q., behavioral problems, and attention deficit disorder.

Langston said it is possible that old paint in some homes could have contributed to the elevated levels and that the group is working to explore all possibilities.

Environmental teams also found a couple locations in Blackwell with slightly elevated levels of cadmium.

Langston said the Oklahoma Attorney General's office, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality and the Oklahoma State Department of Health has been notified of the findings.

Langston said it will take some time to process the information and no time table has been set to file lawsuits.

As for a solution to the problem, Langston said he doesn't know what it is.

"In some instances there may not be a way to fix it," he said.

"I don't know the solution but it needs to be fixed."

Attorneys will be at the VFW on West Furguson in Blackwell from 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. today and Thursday.

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