



THE PONCA CITY NEWS

PONCA CITY, OKLAHOMA

Blackwell Residents Not Happy With Open House



Blackwell Residents Not Happy With Open House

BY SHARON ROWEN

News Staff Writer

BLACKWELL — Blackwell residents turned out in droves for an informative event hosted by Phelps Dodge Tuesday night.

Representatives from Phelps Dodge, Oklahoma State Department of Health, Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality, and Shaw Environmental and Infrastructure Inc. were on hand detailing information on lead poisoning, the zinc smelter once located in Blackwell, and soil sampling.

Many citizens were disappointed and upset to discover that the event was not an open forum but instead display booths to visit one-on-one with the representatives.

One resident that wished to remain anonymous said she expected things to be explained.

"This is not informative to the people who can't read," said the resident. "I think we could lose Blackwell."

Others called the situation political and a game.

"They (Phelps Dodge) are just sucking people in and people are scared," said Diane Sabian.

"They are playing games with people in our town. I don't want to see our town gone, and I don't want people to die."

Resident Larry Fair also commented on the event. "I think 95 percent of the people here tonight are

disappointed," he said.

"We expected a question and answer session. This has been changed to a political thing for Phelps Dodge."

Members of the Shaw Group were on hand signing up residents for soil sampling.

Mike Shaw explained that testing should begin in June. Catherine Castaneda added that close to 50 residents signed up for the free testing and that the company will have representatives on hand at an office located at 123 East Blackwell to assist citizens.

The State Department of Health passed out information on lead poisoning.

On display were charts showing that between the years 2000 and 2006, 222 Blackwell children under the age of six were screened for lead and 97,595 children across the state were screened.

The chart shows that 3.6 percent of the children tested in Blackwell showed elevated lead levels, while across the state 0.9 percent of the children tested showed higher levels of lead.

OSDH officials stressed that they believe the large number of houses in Blackwell built prior to 1950 is a factor because of the use of lead paint.

OSDH representative Cheryl Barr believes that any child living in an older home should be tested for lead.

Jim Telle, Phelps Dodge, said that the company's job Tuesday night was to tell people there is an answer to their questions.

"There is data on all the cleanup that was done," said Telle.

"In the event that there is someone who still has questions about the history of their property, there is an answer to that and it is called soil sampling."

After the event attorneys Nelson Roach, Keith Langston, Cameron Spralting and Blackwell area attorney Jon Ihrig met with the media and expressed their thoughts on the event.

Ihrig said that if things work out, he may assist the other attorneys in the matter.

"This is our town and we want it cleaned up right," said Ihrig.

Roach called the Phelps Dodge open house odd.

"I thought it was odd," said Roach.

"They promised a public forum to explain things and as it turns out it failed. They say they are going to take 0-6 inch samples and 6 inch to 12 inch soil samples and the literature indicates that the arsenic and lead deposition is 3 inches deep, so what that means is if you take a six inch sample, it means you are taking three inches of uncontaminated soil and your mixing it with three inches of contaminated soil so you are diluting your sample by half."

Roach believes that the subject is going to be a public relations battle of information against dis-information.

He added that the real risk at hand is the children of Blackwell.

Commenting on data provided by the OSDH Roach said "You cannot say that this data does not at least tell you that further inquiry is necessary."

Roach is disturbed that the OSDH seems to have already come to the conclusion that the lead contamination in house dust has been caused by lead paint and that to his knowledge ODEQ has done no testing to support that conclusion.

"These people are scientist and scientist are not supposed to draw conclusions with out evidence," he said.

He also raised the question as to why ODEQ is not holding its own informative events.

ODEQ was contacted today for comment but as of press time they did not have one.

Attorney Keith Langston presented a chart that shows that between 1994 and 2006, approximately 379 kids in Blackwell were screened for lead.

The results show that 8.73 percent of the children tested had a blood lead level above 10 micrograms/deciliter.

17.2 percent of the children tested had a blood lead level above 7 micrograms/deciliter.

28.89 percent of the children tested had a blood lead level above 5 micrograms/deciliter.

All children tested were between the ages of 6 and 72

months.

10 micrograms/deciliter is the number that EPA considers elevated and a cause for concern regarding health risks.

5 micrograms/deciliter is the number that we believe the current scientific literature supports when considering health risks in young children.

"No matter how you massage the numbers, Blackwell still has high numbers of elevated lead levels," said Roach.

Roach believes that unless a door to door remediation is done the problem will never be solved.

"Phelps Dodge is trying to Band-Aid a gaping wound," said Roach.

"Most disturbing is that this problem exists today, 34 years after the smelter closed. If Phelps Dodge doesn't clean up Blackwell the way it ought to be cleaned up and the way it should have been cleaned up, then maybe that citizen is right and the city will be lost. But Blackwell has a bright future if it can be cleaned up. These are salt of the earth hard working people here that would be a good work force for a new business."

Attorney Cameron Spralding added "Clean it up and businesses will come."

Today the City of Blackwell released a press release stating that Blackwell City officials met with Phelps Dodge officials Tuesday to start discussions regarding potential settlement of various claims to the Blackwell Zinc site.

City officials also met with members of the law firm Nix Patterson, and Roach.

The attorneys provided city officials with various information that will be evaluated.

The press release also states that Blackwell continues evaluation of a proposed consent decree with ODEQ.

The attorneys will hold a question and answer forum at the Kay Room Thursday night at 7 p.m.

They plan to have Dr. Rod O' Conner on hand to answer questions for citizens.

Some residents said Tuesday night that they would not be attending the attorney's forum.

"If I'm in town I'm going to Hee Haw," said resident Max Smith.

Published Wed, Apr 11, 2007, On Page 1 A

[Back To Front Page](#)

Copyright ©1998-2005 The Ponca City News