



THE PONCA CITY NEWS

PONCA CITY, OKLAHOMA

Blackwell Residents Pleased With Thursday's Open Forum



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Editor's note: Because of the amount of information presented at Thursday's open forum, a second story will appear in Sunday's Ponca City News.

BLACKWELL — Attorney Nelson Roach and Dr. Rod O'Connor, Chemical Consulting Services out of College Station, Texas, presented information to Blackwell citizens Thursday night on lead and arsenic contamination.

The pair discussed data gathered by independent soil samplers and the Oklahoma State Board of Health.

Roach said he believes the data shows more investigation needs to take place and that answers need to be found.

"We believe the data identifies a significant current public health issue," said Roach.

Blackwell was divided into sectors in order to provide a cross-section of the entire community and 34 properties were sampled.

Dust, water, soil and paint samples were obtained.

The firm found no contamination in the drinking water but recommends that well water not be used for any purpose because of Cadmium contamination.

"Even testing by Dodge Phelps shows the ground water is contaminated," said Roach.

Samples also found that 8.8 percent of the homes tested exceeded the HUD/EPA 2007 standard of 400 PPM for lead contamination and that 61.7 percent of

the homes exceeded the California EPA standard of 150 PPM for lead contamination.

Also, 91.1 percent of homes exceeded the EPA 2007 standard of 3.9 PPM for arsenic contamination.

O'Conner spoke on the findings and addressed the dispute as to how much interior house paint is contributing to both the lead and arsenic findings in house dust.

"One of the things we tried is called an isotopic analysis," said O'Conner.

"What we are finding is that the isotopic ratio in the paint is about the same as it is in the house dust but we know that the smelter sold lead to paint companies so for all we know it may be the same paint, we don't know one way or the other."

O'Conner explained a second method used in trying to determine the paint factor.

He said the lead and the arsenic was measured in the house dust and in the paint.

"If the paint is a major contributor to the house dust then the ratio of the lead to arsenic should be about the same in the house dust as it is to paint," said O'Conner.

"It is not remotely the same. We also went through and took pictures of paint inside and outside people's homes, with very few exceptions, the paint is not peeling or flaking, you can have all the lead based paint in your home you want, if you don't eat it or inhale it, it is not going to do any damage. If the paint on the wall is of good quality and not powdery and not flaking off it is not a problem."

O'Conner commented on the fact that at Tuesday's open forum, hosted by Phelps Dodge, information about several sources of lead such as toys and fishing sinkers were displayed at the Oklahoma State Department of Health's booth but no information on the smelter as a possible lead source was present.

"You all have heard the story about the straw that broke the camel's back," said O'Conner.

"I will tell you that the fishing sinker was a straw, the lead based toy was a straw, the cigarette smoking was a straw, and paint was a straw. I want to know who put the 900 pound load on the camel before the straw landed."

The comment brought applause from the audience.

Roach then told the crowd he was surprised and concerned by what he interprets as a defensive reaction of the OSDH when their data was released by the attorneys.

"The OSDH is charged by the Legislature with the duty to protect your health," said Roach.

"I believe prior to the time that Dr. O'Conner called Cheryl W. Barr at the OSDH, that the OSDH didn't go through and evaluate blood lead levels by city to see whether or not there were any clusters of high blood lead levels. Does the OSDH feel they are embarrassed by this or do they feel that maybe they have egg on their face," asked Roach.

"It is my hope and request and probably yours that the OSDH will reevaluate it's initial reaction to the public disclosure of this information and get out in front of this issue and be a part of the solution," he added.

Roach summed it up into four conclusions: The drinking water is not a hazard; groundwater contamination does not appear to present a current public health risk; there is substantial evidence of residential soil and house dust contamination by both lead and arsenic, and no one has collected data to indicate whether the arsenic contamination has caused adverse health affects.

The attorneys recommends and urges the OSDH to conduct an epidemiological study to determine whether arsenic contamination has caused adverse health effects and that they conduct further and more extensive testing of blood lead levels in Blackwell children.

In response to the comments and claims made by Roach and O'Conner, the OSDH issued the following press release today.

The Oklahoma State Department of Health (OSDH) disputes the information provided by various non-health department sources concerning elevated blood lead levels among children living in Blackwell. "We want to correct some of the erroneous information that has been distributed concerning our children's lead screening program," said Dr. Edd Rhoades, deputy commissioner for OSDH Family Health Services.

Surveillance data from the OSDH indicates that from

1994 to 2006, 331 children in Blackwell were tested for elevated blood lead levels. Of that number, 11 children had blood lead levels that were considered to be elevated (defined as 10 micrograms per deciliter of blood taken by venous sample).

"One out of about 30 children tested had elevated blood lead levels, not one in three children, as others have announced," said Rhoades.

The OSDH also took issue with the ages of test subjects and their blood lead levels.

"Contrary to published reports from non-health department sources concerning the number of children over age 5 who showed elevated blood lead levels, our surveillance data indicates approximately 95 percent of the children tested were between the ages of 0 and 5 years during 1994 through 2006. Only 19 children were above the age of 5 when tested, and none of those children had elevated blood lead levels," Rhoades emphasized.

The OSDH said lead-based paint found in older homes is a likely exposure source in the 11 Blackwell children found to have an elevated blood lead level since 1994.

Housing units built prior to 1950 are apt to have deteriorated leaded paint and contaminated dust. In Blackwell, approximately 50 percent of the housing units were built prior to 1950, compared to 18 percent in the rest of the state, and 22.3 percent nationwide.

The OSDH protocols state that home inspections are to be completed for a child under 72 months of age whose blood lead level reaches 20 micrograms per deciliter of blood, or charts persistently between 15 and 19.

Per these protocols, the OSDH has conducted home inspections of five children's homes in Blackwell since 1994. Of those five homes, four were tested for soil contamination and found to be negative. Soil samples were not taken at the fifth home. In three of the five homes, lead-based paint was determined to be the exposure source using x-ray and paint chip sampling techniques.

In one case, exposure sources were both lead-based paint as well as vinyl mini-blinds, as determined by using x-ray and dust wipe methodologies.

And in the final case, using x-ray techniques, ceramic cooking pottery was found to be the exposure source.

"We are always concerned about the potential for children to be exposed to lead poisoning sources," said Rhoades.

"And we encourage parents to consult with their primary healthcare provider regarding the need for blood lead screening. Children found to be at risk should be screened with a blood lead test as part of routine primary care up to age 6."

Rhoades said children enrolled in SoonerCare are required to have blood lead testing at 12 months and again at 24 months of age through their SoonerCare provider.

Testing may also be done through the Kay County Health Department. Parents who wish to have their child tested for elevated blood lead levels should contact the Kay County Health Department, at 580 363-5520, for testing information.

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[Back To Front Page](#)

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