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## Blackwell family distraught about contamination results

By Judy Lambert / J-T Staff Writer

One very upset couple in Blackwell received a letter Saturday from Nix, Patterson & Roach, LLP, attorneys handling the contamination case inside the Blackwell city limits. Jeff Politte and his wife, Lea, have two children, seven and nine, and live in the housing district west of Blackwell Regional Hospital. Theirs was one of the handful of homes that were tested for lead and arsenic content back in December of 2006.

Contained in the letter was the following information: "Your home was found to have unsafe levels of lead and arsenic. The maximum level of arsenic permitted inside a home by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) is 3.9 mg/kg. The maximum level of arsenic in your house dust was found to be 7.55 mg/kg. The maximum level of floor lead permitted inside a home by the EPA is 40 ug/ft2. The floor lead found in your home was 103 ug/ft2.

"The soil surrounding your home was found to also contain unsafe levels of arsenic. The maximum level of arsenic permitted in soil by the EPA is again 3.9 mg/kg. The level of arsenic found in the soil outside your home was 8.71 mg/kg."

Politte and his family have only lived in that housing edition for two years, but altogether they have been in Blackwell over eight years. One of his greatest concerns is their seven-year-old son who has been diagnosed with ADHD and is on medication. "He has seizures," Politte said. According to information he found online, Politte said that his son must be more sensitive to the pollutants than his nine-year-old daughter. As far as the effect on their daughter, she has "just the normal allergies and stuff," he said.

One concern is the use of their air conditioning system. With the air filter being one of the test sites found high in arsenic, the family was told that the use of the air conditioner would put the contamination into the air that they breathe. With the summer weather right around the corner, the air conditioner will be badly needed.

The Polittes are deeply concerned about the physical and mental health of their children. They both have their jobs here in Blackwell, and "we can't afford to just get up and move," Politte said. In naming off several of the symptoms of high lead and arsenic contents, he came across "diabetes," which concerned him. "My son's blood sugar was 140 when they tested him the other day," he said. Of course, this causes more worry for the family. "People need to stand up and say 'we're tired of this,'" Politte said. "We want this stuff cleaned up because it's killing our kids." Pointing out he fact that the schools are inside the contamination zone, he said, "our kids are going to school every day in contamination. We need to test the schools to find out if our kids are safe."

It isn't only the children of Blackwell who are suffering from possible symptoms of this contamination. "We've had diarrhea, cramping... headaches, allergies," he said, which have been symptoms he and his wife have had over a long period of time. He is presently on medication for numbness and tingling in his back and legs, and isn't sure why. He has made arrangements for his family all to have blood tests for lead and arsenic levels. This is an expense that will come out of their own pockets.

Politte has a concern for the people of this town, especially those who seem to take this information so lightly. "I didn't believe it at first," he said. "But when you look at the results staring you in the face," it's hard to deny it. "When it's your name on the paper and they tell you it's your home that is nearly three times above toxic, it makes you worry." He and his wife are finally filling out all the paper work needed to be represented by Nix, Patterson & Roach, along with the hundreds of families who are also living in the contaminated area.

"My kids have played in that dirt," Politte said. "I know we're breathing that day in and day out. It's in our furniture. If we move, the contamination is on everything we own."

Politte, having been suffering from fatigue for some time, found out that his body is low in certain male hormones, which causes him to wonder how many men in this area might be having the same problems. How many couples have found it difficult to conceive a child, he wonders? Could the contamination of lead and arsenic be causing men and women to become sterile? He is firm in believing that Blackwell needs to get the EPA actively involved here and available to help the citizens figure out what to do about the contamination situation in Blackwell. "How many people don't realize the problems this is causing to their bodies?" he asked.

Although Politte hasn't been as active in getting this information out to the public and helping put things in motion, now he says, "I'm interested in stepping up my involvement and volunteering to see that something is done about this and getting other people involved. I want a resolution of this as soon as possible." He believes that the citizens need to make sure this mess gets cleaned up. "This is something that is serious," he said, "and I don't want it to get swept under the rug."

The Politte family is just one of the families whose homes were tested for arsenic and lead contamination caused by the plume of smoke from the smelter that covered the city from the time it opened in the early 1900s until it closed in 1974.

The dirt from around the smelter, which was heavily contaminated, was given away to different people who needed dirt to level out the grounds on their property. It has been spread in different areas across Blackwell. The topsoil is the part that seems to be the most contaminated, and moves constantly, either from the Oklahoma winds or from erosion caused by rain and changing weather. It is the topsoil that is tracked into your homes, finds it's way through the air into your air filters and air conditioning systems. It is in the dust that you clean off your ceiling fans and wipe from your furniture. It is in the carpet dust that fills your vacuum bags and stirs in the air when you sweep your floors. It is in your furniture, on your pets' fur and your children's knees, hands and elbows after playing outside. It is invisible to your eyes,

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cannot be tasted, smelled or purposely touched, but could be everywhere you walk, lay, sit or play. What seems today to be of no real concern to you could show up tomorrow as depression, forgetfulness, breathing problems, arthritis, numbness or tingling, tumors, cysts, ADHD, cancer, lung disease, heart problems, or death.

Admitting that Blackwell has a problem and doing what is needed to take care of it is not admitting weakness. However, ignoring the problem and making light of it may not be the wisest choice for you, your children, your future or the futures of your loved ones.

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