

This newsletter provides you with health information relating to the cleanup of the Rhodes peninsula.

NOTICE:

A meeting of the **NSW Health/Rhodes Community Liaison Group** will be held on the **27th November**.

All welcome.

When? 6-8pm Thursday 27th November 2003

Where? Concord West Public School, Concord Rd.



The meeting provides an opportunity to discuss the health studies being undertaken in the area (see page 2-3 of this newsletter).



What is happening on the Rhodes peninsula?

The former Union Carbide site at Rhodes made pesticides and other chemicals. The group of chemicals known as *dioxins* were a by-product of this process. Waste containing these chemicals was used in the past to fill areas across the peninsula and in Homebush Bay. Clean up of soil and sediments is expected to begin in 2004 and should be completed within 5 years. The land will be redeveloped for residential use in accordance with the Sydney Regional Environment Plan (SREP 29). More information on SREP 29 is available at www.planning.nsw.gov.au/plansforaction/keydevelopment.html.

How will my health be protected while the peninsula is cleaned up?

There are laws to control the clean up of contaminated land. Protection of human health is considered under these laws. These include the *NSW Contaminated Land Management Act* and the *NSW Planning and Assessment Act*. The role of NSW Health includes advocacy for community health. This involves reviewing all the processes on the site that could have an impact on public health and providing advice to relevant agencies.

What are Dioxins?

Dioxins are produced by natural processes (eg.bushfires) and industrial processes (eg.power generation). Dioxins occur in small amounts in air, water and soil throughout the world. Dioxins do not break down easily in the environment and their concentration increases up the food chain. Nearly all people in developed countries have dioxins in their body. This is from the food that we eat, in particular food from animals such as meat and dairy products. The level of dioxin in our bodies increases with age. However, around the world overall human levels of dioxin have been falling due to international efforts to reduce production. The usual level of dioxins found in people in Australia is not known, but a national study to assess this is underway.

What effects can dioxins have?

One of the main health effects in question for dioxins is the risk of cancer in adults. Dioxins have been linked to cancer in animal studies and in studies of people exposed to high levels. In animals, effects on hormones, reproduction and development have also been seen. These effects have occurred at dioxin levels 100 to 1000 times higher than the dioxin levels that people are generally exposed to in developed countries. The World Health Organisation states that dioxin does not affect genetic material and there is a level of exposure below which cancer risk would be negligible.

Have I been exposed to dioxin in the past from industries on the peninsula?

We do not know if people living near the Rhodes peninsula have been exposed to dioxins more than anyone else living in an urban area. There is no evidence that dioxins were released into the air from industries on the peninsula. In the past people sometimes filled their gardens with soil from industrial sites and this could have happened at Rhodes.

What other involvement does NSW Health have?

NSW Health has committed to conduct two health studies, in consultation with the NSW Health-Rhodes community liaison group. The first study involved a review of statistics on cancer in people who live near the peninsula. This study has been completed and a summary of the results is given below. The second will involve reviewing the blood dioxin level of the community before and after the clean up.

Study One: Historical study of cancer in the community

There is some concern in the community that the rates of cancer around the Rhodes peninsula may be higher than in other places. The NSW Cancer Registry has collected information on all new cases of cancer and all deaths from cancer since 1972. The information that NSW Health has reviewed before does not suggest any increase in cancer for people in the previous local government area of Concord.

This study looked at past information on cancer by collector district (a much smaller area than local government area). Rates of cancer and death from cancer in communities around the Rhodes peninsula (Rhodes, Meadowbank and Putney) were compared to rates in other urban areas in NSW. We found that rates of cancer in the last 30 years in communities around the Rhodes peninsula did not differ from other urban areas in NSW. More information will be provided at the meeting on the 27th November.

Study Two: Dioxin study

Some members of the community are concerned that the control process during remediation may not be strict enough, and that they will be exposed to dioxins during the clean up. They would like some guarantee after the clean up is finished that their long-term health has not been adversely affected. This

study aims to determine if there is a change in community blood dioxin levels before and after the works on the peninsula.

To conduct this study we will invite approximately 200 people who live close to the remediation area to participate in the study. If you are chosen to be in the study we will ask you to:

- Attend a Saturday morning clinic at the Rhodes community hall where 50mls of blood will be taken by an experienced blood collector,
- Complete a short questionnaire.



Of course participating in the study is entirely voluntary. Children will not be asked to participate. Blood will also be taken from a control group away from the peninsula to compare the results. People who previously worked in industries producing dioxin will be excluded.

The second stage of the study will involve repeating the blood measurements on the same group of people in the community after the clean up is completed. The average dioxin levels before and after the remediation will then be compared. The results of this study will be presented to a community meeting.

This study is only looking at **average** dioxin levels in the community before and after the clean up. If you decide to participate the study cannot tell you your own blood level of dioxin, or whether you have been exposed to dioxins **in the past**. However the study will be able to look at the particular types of dioxins measured in people's blood compared to that found in soil from the former industrial sites on the peninsula. This study will only go ahead if we can get enough volunteers from Rhodes to participate.

Could my garden soil or ceiling dust contain chemicals?

In urban areas in Australia it is common for soil and ceiling dust to contain lead and other chemicals. If you are renovating your home and it was painted before the 1950s, removal of paint should be done by professionals so that paint does not enter your home. Professionals should also perform removal of ceiling dust. This is especially important if there are young children or pregnant women in the house, as they are particularly susceptible to the effects of lead and other chemicals.

As the Rhodes area had a lot of industry in the past it is possible your soil could be affected. There are some simple measures that apply to people in **all** urban areas for reducing the amount of soil and dust around your home.

- Keep soil covered with grass or mulch
- Wash hands after playing or working outdoors, and before eating
- Wash toys frequently, especially if used outside
- Wash infrequently used plates and dishes before use
- Have a door mat at all doors
- Try to leave shoes at the door
- If renovating, have roof spaces professionally cleaned

Be careful stripping old paint and follow guidelines for reducing exposure to lead (refer to www.epa.nsw.gov.au for a leaflet on safe removal of leaded paint)

Should I get my soil tested?

Soil testing is expensive. We believe it is more practicable to avoid exposure to soil or build up garden beds with clean soil or compost.



What about fishing in the bay?

In 1988, dioxin contamination was identified in sediments in Homebush Bay. Following a fish and prawn analysis a commercial fin-fishing ban was imposed on the Parramatta River west of the Gladesville Bridge, and a total fishing ban on Homebush Bay. Residents are advised not to eat any fish caught in Homebush Bay.

What about fruit and vegetables grown in the garden?

The amount of lead and dioxin taken up by fruit and vegetables is small and the contribution of this to your total dietary intake of dioxins is likely to be very small. However, washing produce from the garden prior to consumption is wise.

What about chickens?

If you have chickens in the backyard and the soil *does* contain lead or dioxins their eggs may have elevated levels. If you have any concerns about the quality of soil in your yard and you are thinking of establishing a chicken coop, it would be a good idea to place a new layer of soil under your chicken coop.

Where can I get more information?



- Information on the remediation can be obtained from www.rhodesremediation.nsw.gov.au or by calling **1800 660 880**
- Information about the legislation relating to contaminated land can be found on the Department of Environment and Conservation website or by telephoning 9995 5000.
- Information about the health studies can be obtained by telephoning 9816 0244.
- There are several community groups active in the area. The *Rhodes Residents Group* can be contacted by phoning Carol Kendall (97435604) or Jenny Nicholls (97430613). The *Rhodes Peninsula Group* can be contacted by calling Paul Hanly (97362419). The *Rhodes Peninsula Group* website, which contains information from a variety of sources, can be viewed at www.rhodesnsw.org. The *Meadowbank-West Ryde Progress Association* can be contacted via their website (www.mwrpa.org.au).
- Further information can be obtained from your local **Public Health Unit:**
 - **Central Sydney Public Health Unit:**
ph: **9515 3180** (residents of Canada Bay local government area)
 - **Western Sydney Public Health Unit:**
ph: **9840 3603** (residents of Auburn local government area)
 - **Northern Sydney Public Health Unit:**
ph: **9477 9400** (residents of Ryde local government area).

