

Final report confirms Coldwater Creek cancer risk

1 May 2019, by Jim Salter

A federal agency has issued a final report confirming its earlier finding that people who lived near a St. Louis County creek contaminated with nuclear waste could face a higher risk of developing certain types of cancer.

The report released Tuesday by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry addressed concerns about Coldwater Creek. A [preliminary report](#) issued in June said people exposed to the creek from the 1960s to the 1990s may have an increased risk of bone cancer, lung cancer and leukemia. The [final report](#) concurs with those findings.

Nuclear waste from World War II weapons production contaminated the creek decades ago. The waste was dumped at sites near Lambert Airport, next to the creek that flows to the Missouri River in north St. Louis County. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has been cleaning up the creek for two decades.

More than 140 current and former residents have filed federal lawsuits in recent years alleging [nuclear waste](#) exposure caused illness or death.

Mark Behlman, 61, lost his 51-year-old wife to lung cancer a decade ago. Though she smoked, her oncologist told her smoking was not the cause. She grew up two blocks from Coldwater Creek.

Behlman is active in a volunteer group called Coldwater Creek—Just the Facts, which has tracked roughly 6,000 former and current residents of the area who have been diagnosed with cancer, including extremely rare cancers such as appendix cancer.

"They put these maps together and started tracking this years ago, and it's just amazing how many dots (signifying people with cancer) follow the creek," Behlman said.

Missouri health officials requested [federal assistance](#) after a 2014 report indicated high rates of leukemia, breast, colon and other cancers in the areas surrounding Coldwater Creek. The [toxic substances](#) agency, which is part of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, launched a study 2 1/2 years ago into the potential link between the creek contamination and cancer cases.

The agency determined that those exposed daily to the creek starting in the 2000s, when cleanup began, could have a slightly increased risk of [lung cancer](#).

Cancer clusters are difficult for scientists to investigate because of the complexity of the disease. The agency's investigators used historical data from soil testing to determine exposure level estimates.

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