

Pompton Lakes Health CAG Meeting Summary March 22, 2011

The following is a summary of the March 22, 2011 meeting of the Community Advisory Group for Health (Health CAG). The summary is organized by topic area, and should not be considered as chronological minutes from the meeting. The main issues raised during the meeting are as follows:

Update on Community Profile: Joe gave a brief update on the status of the community profile stating that DHSS is moving forward with evaluating the various health outcomes as discussed in the public health response plan. This information will be provided to the CAG at future meetings.

Results of Physician Feedback Survey: Christa gave a summary of the physician feedback survey which involved sending a letter to physicians in the Pompton Lakes area requesting feedback whether patients have come to them expressing concerns about environmental exposures and health effects due to the Pompton Lakes groundwater contamination. Christa explained that 70 letters were sent to physicians in 10 towns, including Pompton Lakes. Of these, 30 responses were received (43%). Of those that responded, 27% of physicians had patients come to them with health concerns related to environmental exposures and 73% did not. The physicians reported the following health concerns expressed by patients: cancer in general, chronic sinusitis/sinus infections, thyroid cancer, lymphoma, autoimmune disease, irregular menstrual periods, and arthritis. Christa stated that this information will be provided to the physicians from EOHSI and PEHSU at Mt Sinai.

Bruce Weiner expressed concern about physicians from hospitals in the area not being included in the survey and that hospitalization data won't be captured. Jerry explained that DHSS is evaluating hospitalization data as part of the community profile, so data from all hospitals in the area will be included.

Discussion with by Dr. Michelle Watters, Medical Officer, ATSDR: Leah Graziano gave a brief summary of the first presentation given by Dr. Watters to physicians at Chilton Memorial Hospital on March 9th. She stated that 35-40 physicians attended the presentation and the questions and issues brought up by the physicians led to very good discussions and it was a very successful and informative session.

Dr. Watters then gave an overview of her presentation that was given to physicians at Chilton Memorial and stated that this same information will be given at the March 23rd grand rounds session at St. Joseph's Hospital as well. Dr. Watters gave the physicians information on TCE and PCE and discussed taking an exposure history. She stated that if residents have any environmental data (indoor air, drinking water, etc.), they should bring this information to their physician so that this information will be part of their individual exposure history. She explained that there are data gaps for past exposures and there is no way to go back and retrieve this information. However, based on the historical and current data that we have, Dr. Watters does not feel that medical screening beyond

normal, age-appropriate medical care is needed. This is due to the low risk of health effects expected at the low concentrations found in indoor air and drinking water.

Dr. Watters also explained that biological testing for PCE and TCE (blood, breath) would not be practical because these solvents do not stay in the body for long periods. She mentioned that the concentrations in the indoor air are low and that it would be very unlikely that a medical test would be able to detect them or their breakdown products. Dr. Watters explained that TCE and PCE have similar metabolic pathways as alcohol and affect the same target organs (liver and kidneys).

Though non-routine medical testing for exposure is not warranted, Dr. Watters emphasized that residents living in the groundwater plume should have a sub-slab vapor mitigation system installed in order to eliminate the exposure pathway and prevent future exposures.

Questions/Comments for Dr. Watters from CAG: Bruce Weiner asked if copies of Dr. Watter's presentation could be distributed to the CAG so residents can bring this information to their physicians. Leah stated she will provide this information upon request and DHSS will post it on their website. One resident asked if there is a way to screen the liver and/or kidney (i.e. ultrasound) for organ damage or cancer caused by TCE/PCE exposure. Dr. Watters stated that there is no specific test to detect organ damage for TCE/PCE; however, basic blood tests which check for liver and kidney function would be able to detect abnormalities which may require additional follow-up by the physician. Another resident asked if a breathalyzer test would be appropriate to determine exposure prior to getting the vapor mitigation system installed. Dr. Watters explained that a breathalyzer test is not a sensitive test and would not pick up the volatile chemicals at the low levels found in homes. Lisa Riggiola asked if there was a way to test yourself before you get sick. Dr. Watters explained that health effects are not likely and normal medical care is sufficient to detect medical issues.

Regina Sisco asked about past exposures and length of time living in the plume. Dr. Watters stated that the levels detected in the homes above the plume were low and not likely to cause health effects, but at the same time, there are data gaps and we don't know how much people may have been exposed to in the past; therefore, it is a good idea to bring any environmental sampling data to your physician. Bruce Weiner commented that the cancers and other health effects being observed in Pompton Lakes may be due to another cause other than PCE and TCE since the levels of these contaminants are negligible. Cas Stark mentioned a possibility that benzene may be the cause of the many health effects being observed and that benzene should be looked at. Somia stated that benzene was sampled and detected along with the other volatile organic compounds during the indoor air testing done on the homes. Dr. Watters also stated that leukemia is the main cancer related to benzene and this cancer was not elevated in the DHSS 2009 cancer incidence report. Joe stated that many health outcomes are being evaluated as part of the community profile, so other potential health outcomes are being looked at.

Daria Sweeney was concerned about vinyl chloride which was found to be 152 ug/l in the groundwater based on information provided in the environmental CAG meeting. Vinyl chloride was sampled in the indoor air of homes and found to be elevated above screening levels at one residence. A resident requested adding other area hospitals to grand rounds presentations with Dr. Watters. Leah will check to see if this can be done.

Agency Action Items:

ATSDR/DHSS will provide copies of Dr. Watter's presentation to CAG members and DHSS will post this information on the DHSS Pompton Lakes website.

ATSDR/DHSS will provide the handouts from Dr. Watter's presentation to CAG members.

ATSDR will look into providing additional grand rounds sessions with Dr. Watters at other area hospitals in the future.

List of Health CAG Meeting Attendees, March 22, 2011:

Community Members (based on sign-in sheet; although others were present)

Lisa Riggiola	Barbara Doka	Daniel Genova	Karen Magee
Bruce Weiner	Ed Fischer	Nick and Joyce Fern	Terri Reicher
Darcy Kamp	Tracy Alvarez	Sandy DiSanto	Helen Martens
Cas Stark	Ruth Paez	Mary Anne Orapello	Regina Sisco
Josephine Bruno	Debbie Priestner	Hans & Lee Kirchheimer	Bill Baig

Other Interested Parties

Jacky Grindrod (Congressman Pascrell's Office)

Department of Health and Senior Services

Joe Eldridge
Jerry Fagliano
Somia Aluwalia
Christa Fontecchio
Kate McGreevy

Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry

Leah Graziano
Elena Vaouli
Raquel Stephenson