

## Health News What's Behind Mystery Cancer Cluster?

(Dec. 15) - Forty-six year old Sandy Wierschke, a once energetic, healthy woman with a career, husband and a child, is dying from brain cancer.

"I don't know what the future holds for me anymore," she said. "I am just living three months to three months and hoping that I can make it another three months."

That's how her neighbor Bryan Freund is living, too. He also has brain cancer. Neighbors on either side of his home have also developed brain cancer, CBS News national correspondent Byron Pitts reports.

"And at that point between us and the Branhams and the Weisenbergers, we just knew that something was far out of the ordinary," Freund said. "You live MRI to MRI."

And there are more cases. More than a dozen cases.

"I am John Smith," said another patient. "I am on my second brain tumor."

An amateur video shows residents in McCullom Lake Village. It is a community of a thousand people - but every person in the video either has a brain tumor, lives with a relative with one or lost someone to

brain cancer.

There, in a community of about 1,000 people, 14 residents have developed brain cancer. Nationally the rate is roughly seven out of 100,000.

Coincidence?

Attorney Aaron Freiwald says "absolutely not." He represents the McCollum Lake Village residents in their lawsuits against multi-billion dollar chemical company Rohm and Haas. Rohm and Hass has had a plant there since 1963. It makes specialty chemicals that are used in a variety of industries - from plastics to pesticides. It has 140 facilities in 27 countries.

"These people who lived in McCollum Lake did not know what was going on just a mile or so away. They didn't know. They didn't know until people were found to have brain cancer in these really striking numbers," Freiwald said.

The company admits that for 20 years ending in 1979, it dumped toxic chemical waste in an eight-acre pit on its property. The groundwater beneath the plant is polluted with gallons of chemicals - some are known human carcinogens. In May, the county tested only 14 of the water

wells around McCullom Lake Village and found no contamination.

But local residents say no testing was done during the time Rohm and Haas was dumping chemicals.

“They knew that there were chemicals in there - that they were dangerous,” Freiwald said.

Whatever is happening in McHenry, Ill., seems to be going on 800 miles east in Philadelphia. And it’s not outside a Rohm and Haas plant - but inside.

“The doctors knew right away that there was something terribly wrong,” said Lee Hsu, whose husband Charles was one of 12 research scientists who has died of brain cancer in the past 30 years, working at the Rohm and Haas facilities north of Philadelphia. “It was the saddest day in my life.”

At least five of the 12 researchers worked on one hallway in this one building - building Number 4.

Hsu’s supervisor, Barry Lange, also died of brain cancer. His widow, Linda Lange, and several other widows are suing Rohm and Haas.

“I think there could be a cancer cluster there, you know Charles Hsu worked for my husband,” Linda Lange said. “I am not a scientist but the numbers alone make me questions it.”

Corporate whistleblower Thomas Haag

said: “I was lied to, I was given the run-around, I was stalled and I was brushed off. I don’t brush off easily.”

Haag is a trained chemist and former executive at Rohm and Haas. In 1996, he wrote the company’s chief of medicine about a possible brain cancer problem at the company. But it wasn’t until six years later when two more scientists died and one more was diagnosed with brain cancer that the company decided to conduct its own study.

“I think the company is wrong from end to end,” Haag said. “I think they have committed fraud in not alerting their own employees.”

But Rohm and Haas’s chief of medicine Dr. Phil Lewis, said “for anyone to suggest that there was anything other than the best science here, they really don’t know what they’re talking about.”

Pitts asked him: “That makes you angry?”

“It does,” Lewis said. “It’s an insult. It’s absurd.”

Pitts said: “All of these research scientists on the one hallway in a small space developed brain cancer. Coincidence?”

“First thing, it is important to understand that that could be a coincidence,” Lewis said.

Dr. Lewis said Rohm and Haas conducted its own internal investigation in 2002 and 2007, but found no link between

the cancer cases and the company.

But the federal government told Rohm and Haas their study was seriously flawed. NIOSH, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, a federal agency, is responsible for preventing work-related illnesses. They called for an independent study.

“They gave us some good ideas,” Lewis said of NIOSH. “It was a good, helpful exchange.”

Pitts said: “My reading of their findings was that they were highly critical. They used phrases like ‘highly unusual,’ ‘unsound,’ ‘disturbing,’ ‘scattershod approach.’”

“Yeah, the terrible thing to understand is when scientists talk to themselves, it can get ugly,” Lewis said.

He sums up the cancer cases in McCullom Lake Village and in Building #4 as likely coincidences, but the company has commissioned an independent study.

“I’m about, let’s keep the people well, right? And if there’s something that’s wrong that’s out there that caused them to get sick, let’s find out what it is and deal with it,” Lewis said.

“But if the company is responsible, this is a \$9 billion company. You could lose a lot of money, if you’re proven to be responsible,” Pitts said.

“Don’t care, don’t care,” Lewis said. “I

could tell you right now, if I thought there was something that was causing those cancers I’d shut that building down. That’s what the company’s about. Do the right thing.”

“The folk in McCullom Lake Village will watch this story. What would you say to them?” Pitts asked.

“I can sympathize with everyone who says, ‘I got to find a cause, I got to know what caused this.’ What I do know is that ... there is no exposure in McCollum Lake to anything at our plant,” Lewis said.

Speaking with cancer victim Bryan Freund, Pitts said: “You’re 47 now.”

“They told me after the diagnosis that the average prognosis is three to five years. So I’ve got three so far. And there’s now guarantee on the rest,” Freund said.

For Freund, the widows in Philadelphia and the neighbors in McCollum Lake Village - all agree that there are no guarantees they’ll find what is causing these cluster of cancer cases.

Is it a coincidence or something more? It will be up to science or the courts to decide.