

CANCER CONNECTION?



DTE Energy's Fermi 2 Nuclear Power Plant in Newport, which sits on the shores of Lake Erie, is pictured. [MONROE NEWS FILE PHOTO]

Study: Elevated cancer deaths in Monroe may be result of nuclear plant

By Tyler Eagle

The Monroe News
USA TODAY NETWORK

A new study has found that Monroe County's cancer mortality rate is significantly higher than that of the national average.

And the scientist behind the study contends the driving force behind that statistic is DTE Energy's Fermi 2 Nuclear Power Plant in Newport.

Epidemiologist and executive director of the Radiation and Health Project Joseph Mangano unveiled a report titled "Fermi 2 Nuclear Reactor and Rising Cancer Rates" Thursday afternoon during a virtual press conference.

Using mortality data collected by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Mangano's analysis found that cancer-related deaths in Monroe County were 14.3% higher than the national average.

"We have raised red flags — these are matters of concern," Mangano said. "There are no other obvious reasons for such an unexpected change. ...

"You wouldn't think Monroe County is a (center) for cancer. It's a suburban county."

The national average for cancer-related deaths nationally was about 150 deaths per 100,000, according to Mangano's report. Monroe County's most recent metric — which is

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10th anniversary of Japan's Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster, **Page A7.**

from 2019 — was 170 per 100,000.

Prior to Fermi 2's activation in 1985, Monroe County's cancer death rate was 3% less the national average, according to Mangano. He said the elevated trend has continued to increase in the last ten years, resulting in the most recent and highest metric.

Mangano said elevated risk and mortality of cancer was present in all population groups, including those classified by gender, race and age.

His report shows that in Monroe County, 10 of the 11 most common cancers in the U.S. occurred at a significantly higher rate, including leukemia, brain and central nervous system and bronchus and lung cancers.

The report also indicates that cancer-related mortality among younger populations is also much higher than the national average.

According to the report, cancer-related deaths among those ages 0-24 occurred 40.2% more than the national average.

Among those ages 25-49, the rate was 49.2% above the U.S. average.

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Mangano is calling for more research into the matter, saying the federal and state government have not done enough to examine nuclear plants' impact on those who live near such sites.

"You don't have to wait for a meltdown for nuclear reactor to harm people," Mangano said. "Every single day, reactors release a mix of 100 or more (harmful) chemicals into the environment. It gets into people's bodies through the food chain."

The event was held to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the Fukushima nuclear power plant disaster in Japan.

In 2011, a tsunami triggered by an earthquake caused damage to the nuclear plant, causing a destabilization of Fukushima and its safety protocols. The incident spurred increased scrutiny of nuclear plants across the globe.

Calling it the worst man-made environmental disaster in history, Mangano said it is a reminder of the harm nuclear power yields, which is additional analysis and studies are imperative.

"We want more analysis from other researchers and public officials," Mangano said. "Any policy decisions should really take this kind of consideration into (account)."

Mangano also discussed a new initiative to collect donated baby teeth from Monroe County residents in an effort to investigate whether there are increased instances of in-body radioactive contamination.

Mangano said the Tooth Fairy Project will analyze collected specimens for Strontium-90, a harmful substance that is a byproduct of nuclear reaction.

The project will seek to collect 25-50 local specimens, he said.

Christie Brinkley, an American entertainer who was born in Monroe, endorsed the tooth-collecting initiative.

A board member of the Radiation and Public Health Project, Brinkley talked about the experience as a

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Joseph Mangano, Epidemiologist and executive director of the Radiation and Health Project

mother of going into her kids' rooms after they lost a baby tooth and placed it under their pillow.s

"... (many mothers) may have had no idea that tooth may contain something we would be upset to learn was there ...," she said. "If your child has Strontium in their baby tooth, they've been exposed."

She urged Monroe parents to donate those teeth to research. She said there is a false sense of security about nuclear power which in part inspired her to become an activist.

"(Nuclear power) has built up so much waste and pushed it onto future generations," she said. "... we've failed future generations with this mess."

Michael Keegan, co-chair of the Don't Waste Michigan advocacy group and a Monroe resident, also spoke during the press conference.

A longtime advocate against nuclear power, he said there are many alternative energy sources these days that are safer.

"You don't need an earthquake or tsunami to bring a nuclear reactor into a shutdown," he said. "... It's a very precarious situation with nuclear power."

Like Mangano and Brinkley, he urged Monroe County residents to read the report and take part in the Tooth Fairy Project.

"(The study) provides a smoking gun," Keegan said. "The source of the radiation is going to the Fermi 2 plant. We believe a further investigation is warranted."

For more information, to read Mangano's report in full or to find out how to participate in the Tooth Fairy Project, visit radiation.org.