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Indoor pollution linked to cancer jump

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LOS ANGELES (AP) — Employees in two state buildings, including Caltrans headquarters in Sacramento, show high rates of melanoma skin cancer from a "time bomb" environment of toxic chemicals, researchers say.

A tenfold increase in melanoma has been reported among the employees, said Dr. Alex Kelter, chief epidemiologist of the state Department of Health Services.

In another building, 18 of the 100 workers have contracted forms of cancer in the last five years, according to Hal Levin, an environmental research specialist from the University of California at Berkeley.

The cancer symptoms can be blamed on the proliferation of synthetic wood materials that emit formaldehyde fibers and on fluorescent light fixtures that may leak polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), the researchers told the Assembly Committee on Consumer Protection and Toxic Materials.

In testimony yesterday, Levin said most carcinogenic pollution problems are found in newer buildings, which lack natural ventilation and are made of synthetic materials.

"We have to recognize that we may be sitting in a time bomb that will explode at the birth of the next generation with more cancers and birth defects and other illnesses," Levin said.

Levin declined to name the other state building in which a high incidence of melanoma cancer has been reported. But he said he would name it in a written report later.

The committee head, Sally Tanner, D-El Monte, also said she will identify the building when she receives Levin's report.

The unidentified building's employees already are aware of the problem, Levin said.

Levin told the committee that state agencies have failed to investigate whether indoor pollution is the cause.

Kelter said his department has recommended a methodical investigation of the hazard in the Caltrans building but said Caltrans has refused to authorize the $250,000 that the studies would cost.

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Employees in two state buildings show high rates of skin cancer

1407

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Employees in two state buildings show high rates of skin cancer from a "time bomb" environment of toxic chemicals, researchers say.

One of the buildings involved is the California Department of Transportation's headquarters in Sacramento. The other was not identified.

A tenfold increase in melanoma, or skin cancer, has been reported among employees of the Sacramento building, according to Dr. Alex Kelter, chief epidemologist of the California Department of Health Services.

In the other building, 18 of the 100 workers have contracted forms of cancer in the last five years, according to Hal Levin, a researcher from the University of California at Berkeley.

The cancer symptoms can be blamed on the proliferation of synthetic-wood materials that emit formaldehyde fibers and on flourescent light fixtures that may leak PCBs, or polychlorinated biphenols, the researchers told the Assembly Committee on Consumer Protection and Toxic Materials.

Levin said Tuesday that most carcinogenic-pollution problems are found in newer buildings, which lack natural ventilation and are made of a variety of synthetic materials.

He said, "We have to recognize that we may be sitting in a time bomb that will explode at the birth of the next generation with more cancers and birth defects and other illnesses."

Levin declined to name the other state building in which a high incidence of melanoma has been reported. He said he will name it in a report later in the week.

Employee's of the building are aware of the problem, Levin said.

He said state agencies have failed to investigate whether indoor pollution is the cause of the cancers in the two buildings.

Kelter said his department has recommended an investigation of the melanoma problem in the Sacramento building, but said the Department of Transportation has refused to authorize the $250,000 that the studies would cost.

In a letter, Dr. C.B. Meyer, a professor of chemistry at the University of Washington, recommended that California require manufacturers to disclose formaldehyde-emission rates for all plywood, particle board and fiber board so that agencies can select those with the lowest emissions.

He said formaldehyde is found in resins and glues used to make many composite wood products used in construction.

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