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New Cancer Valley data add to the confusion

The recurring debate between chemical companies and residents of West Virginia's heavily industrialized Kanawha Valley over the meaning of local death statistics heated up again last week. State Health Dept. officials released results of a mortality survey conducted in a small section of North Charleston, W. Va., and it showed that there were 10 cancer deaths during the past 10 years, or nearly twice the expected rate of 5.36 cancer deaths for a population of comparable size. While state health officials have carefully refrained from assessing blame in their report, people in the area haven't hesitated to point the finger at the chemical industry.

The area's sizable chemical industry has lived with what many believe to be the unfair tag of Cancer Valley for two decades. While scientists are puzzled about what conclusions can be drawn from contradictory figures in various studies, some locals are not. The description is accurate because of the abundance of chemical plants and the fact that the steep valley traps pollutants, says Charles G. Garlow, director of the West Virginia Clean Air Coalition.

No surprises. Regarding the newly released statistics of the state health department, he notes, "The survey confirmed what the people in that community had felt for years. . . ." Residents, he adds, know they are "right in the path of all the goop, [all the] chemical air pollutants that are probably put out by Union Carbide." There is also a large FMC plant down the river.

The confusion about these and other factors persists because the conflicting studies have been based on the same information. For example, Standard Mortality, a national listing of cancer deaths by county and state, shows that the rate in Charleston is 1.06, or 6% above the national standard of 1. At the same time, two other studies, both claiming to report similar statistics, say the Kanawha Valley's cancer death rate is at or below the national average. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has also issued a study concluding that airborne concentrations found in the Charleston area from 1975 to 1977 do not approach harmful levels.

The facilities of FMC and Union Carbide are the closest to the area surveyed. Carbide's Blaine Island plant is just across the river from the neighborhood surveyed by state health department officials. It manufactures a variety

of specialty chemicals, including polyols and vinyl resins, and employs about 1,500 people. Just downstream, FMC's facility produces chlorine and caustic soda, and employs about 1,300 workers.

For its part, Carbide denies that its plant is connected with the mortality rate. "The death information available to Union Carbide indicates there is no relationship between the North Charleston health concern and emissions from the South Charleston plant." And FMC issues a similar response: "We've done some pretty extensive epidemiological surveys on our employees. The results show that we have fewer health problems than the general population."

Further, both FMC and Union Carbide assert that they are in compliance with existing state air-quality laws. Carl Beard, director of the West Virginia Air Pollution Control Commission (APCC), adds: "I don't know and I don't think anybody knows that any air pollution has caused any excess malignancies." But on the other hand, he says, "we don't know it hasn't." Beard, a 19-year veteran of air-quality control work, initiated the state health department study, and his agency is now assuming the lead role in the climate of controversy.

Toward this end, Beard's APCC has asked Carbide and FMC to provide it with a complete list of emissions from their facilities. The APCC will take the data and will add information on emissions from other Charleston-area industries, completing an inventory for the region. "We're starting there [with Carbide and FMC]," says Beard. "We'll do the Kanawha Valley. Then we'll look at the other chemical industries and other industries in the state. We're going to find out what is being discharged into the ambient air that could possibly affect anybody's health."

A TVA veto of plants will lower power rates

In a 2-to-1 vote of the board of directors, the Tennessee Valley Authority last week postponed building three nuclear units totaling 3,949 megawatts of electrical power. For industrial customers, who complained that TVA's electrical rates were too high, the decision against further spending on the units—\$2 billion of an estimated \$10 billion has already been spent—means that electrical power rates in the valley could be about 7% lower in the 1990s.

While the board emphasizes that deferral does not mean cancellation, agency directors and top staffers concede privately that these units and five others already deferred will probably never be built. That would leave TVA with 9 operating nuclear units in the next decade instead of a planned 17. And, TVA says, it would move Chicago's Commonwealth Edison into the front as the nation's most nuclear-dependent utility.

A standoff. Public debate over the deferral issue pitted powerful interests, such as the agency's 160 distributors, against 30 directly served, energy-intensive customers. TVA directors S. David Freeman and Richard Freeman, who are not related, voted the position endorsed by the industrial customers; President Reagan's only appointee to the board, Chairman Charles "Chili" Dean, voted to continue construction.

The five units already in operation on the system are at Browns Ferry and Sequoyah; the units deferred last week were Hartsville A1 and A2 and Yellow Creek 1. TVA currently has four nuclear units under construction at the Watts Bar and Bellefonte plants (total 5,182 Mw) that will not be affected by defer-

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The CW weekly index of chemical prices

290		
285		
281		
287		
283		
	Latest week	

Latest week	293.5
Previous week	293.5
Month ago	293.5
Year ago	297.2

