

Herbicide use brings lawsuit by 6 women

MISSOULA (AP) — Six women from the Condon area who fear that herbicides caused them to have miscarriages filed suit in state district court here Friday against the manufacturers and the agencies that use the herbicides in Montana.

The class-action suit asks for unspecified monetary damages and a court order halting use of the herbicides 2,4,5-T and 2,4-D in Montana.

The suit charges that Dow Chemical Co. and other unidentified companies manufactured the herbicides "in a negligent and reckless manner, with little or no concern for the effect of these products on the health of individuals directly or indirectly exposed to them."

The suit also charges that Burlington Northern Inc., the state Highway Department, Lake and Missoula counties and the counties' weed control boards used the herbicides negligently and recklessly.

All of the women live in a 15-mile stretch of the Swan Valley along Montana 83. The six say they have had seven miscarriages and only one live birth in the past two and one-half years.

The plaintiffs are Virginia Polsen, 34, Colleen Kester son, 31, Barbara Wood, 35, Melody Nebel, 23, Sheri Bardo, 31, and Anne Kobylenski, 25.

9 or 10 pregnant women miscarry; herbicide blamed

CONDON (AP) — Nine of 10 pregnant women who came to this sparsely populated area of the Swan Valley in Western Montana to escape the hazards of big city living suffered miscarriages in a one-year period, and area residents blame the annual spraying of the herbicide 2,4-D.

The area's only successful birth during the 12-month period ending last fall was by a woman who had been attending school out of state and returned to the area to have her baby, said Dr. Ralph Campbell, Lake County health officer.

Residents of the 10-mile stretch along Montana 209 just north of Missoula County say they are increasingly frustrated by "the ho-hum attitude of the bureaucracy" toward the situation.

"They just don't seem concerned, and they don't like the questions that are being asked," said Virginia Polsen, whose miscarriage in the fall of 1978 was the first.

Lake County Commissioner Bill Burley said the Swan Valley residents have not contacted the commission directly, but that Campbell had reported their concerns. Commissioner Don Corrigan said he was sure the county would start an investigation if the residents asked.

Campbell said it has been almost impossible to find out who has been spraying in the area, and with what chemicals.

The state Highway Department contracts with counties to spray "noxious" weeds along roadsides, and the department specifies 2,4-D, said Bill Hebert, field maintenance chief in the Kalispell office. The herbicide is not restricted and may be bought by the public, he said.

Hebert said he is certain that Lake County sprays in the Swan Valley area where the miscarriages occurred, probably each May and June.

Campbell said he is convinced 2,4-D is the culprit, "but it's like all these cumulative poisons — how do you prove it?"

Campbell used questionnaires to interview the families after he and Virginia Reber, county health nurse, met with them last spring.

"We found these people to be living the pristine life, growing their own food and watching their eating habits," Campbell said.

"The striking thing is, without exception, that they all seemed to be healthy, well-informed people with good living habits. They came to live in that area to be away from the hazards of the civilized world."

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