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We're going sterile

Pollution is ruining the American male

Special to The Post

WASHINGTON — American men appear to be going sterile.

A new study released today shows sperm density declined by one-third since 1929.

If the decline continues at this rate, most American men would be sterile in another 50 to 100 years.

The study suggests that chemical pollutants may be to blame.

Dr. Ralph Dougherty of Florida State University, who conducted the study using 132 volunteer college students, said, "It is possible that toxic substances in the environment may be partially responsible."

Dougherty said a 1929 study showed the sperm density of an average American man was 100 million per milliliter of semen.

By 1974, the figure had dropped to 65 million.

And the new study put it at 60 million a milliliter.

A man with a sperm density of 20 million a milliliter is considered by many medical authorities to be sterile, Dougherty told a meeting of the American Chemical Society.

Using this standard, he said, 23 per cent of the students who participated in the test were sterile.

Dougherty cautioned, however, that college students may not be typical of the general population, and that some sterility may be temporary.

Some studies indicate that stress, cigaret and marijuana smoking and very high sexual activity can lower sperm count.

These conditions often are more common with college students.

All of the semen samples studied were contaminated with toxic substances at low levels.

Among the chemicals that may be to blame, he said, are PCBs, which have been used in various industrial processes for 50 years.

Federal environmental officials restricted their use in 1978.

The problem is not confined to the United States.

The sperm count is also decreasing among men living in Western Europe, Japan and other industrialized areas.

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