

BILL RICHARDSON
3rd DISTRICT, NEW MEXICO

COMMITTEES:
ENERGY AND COMMERCE
INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
HELSINKI COMMISSION
ON HUMAN RIGHTS
SELECT COMMITTEE ON INTELLIGENCE
SELECT COMMITTEE ON AGING



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515
July 26, 1991

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WASHINGTON, DC 20515
(202) 225-6190

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Mr. Christian R. Holmes
Deputy Assistant Administrator for
Federal Facilities Enforcement
Room W-1035, LE133
401 M Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Mr. Chris Holmes:

I would like to bring to your attention a matter of critical importance to the constituents of the third district of New Mexico. In recent days, numerous allegations have arisen regarding the existence of a possible brain cancer cluster in the vicinity of the Los Alamos National Laboratories in Los Alamos, New Mexico. As you may know, the matter has received considerable attention and I have enclosed several news articles for your information.

As a result, I have asked the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry to conduct a rigorous and comprehensive investigation of possible health effects due to toxic, radioactive emissions or other substances which may be present in the LANL vicinity. I believe it is important for the residents of Los Alamos to have truthful and accurate information about any particular health risks associated with toxic, plutonium or other radioactive releases or substances which may be present in the immediate environment.

For these reasons, I respectfully request that your Agency provide me with the below listed information. Please provide the same information to the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

- Any information you may have on the release of hazardous substances into the environment both on-site and off-site;
- an inventory of designated waste disposal sites at LANL; and
- any information on known contamination of soil, air, surface or ground water both naturally occurring (such as radon) or man made.

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Furthermore, please advise me and the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry whether the Los Alamos National Laboratories has ever been scored by the hazard ranking system, and if so, what score the site received and whether there are any plans to list, or propose the site for listing. 644-57

I look forward to your response. Should you have any questions, please don't hesitate to contact me or my Washington staff.

With warm regards,

Bill

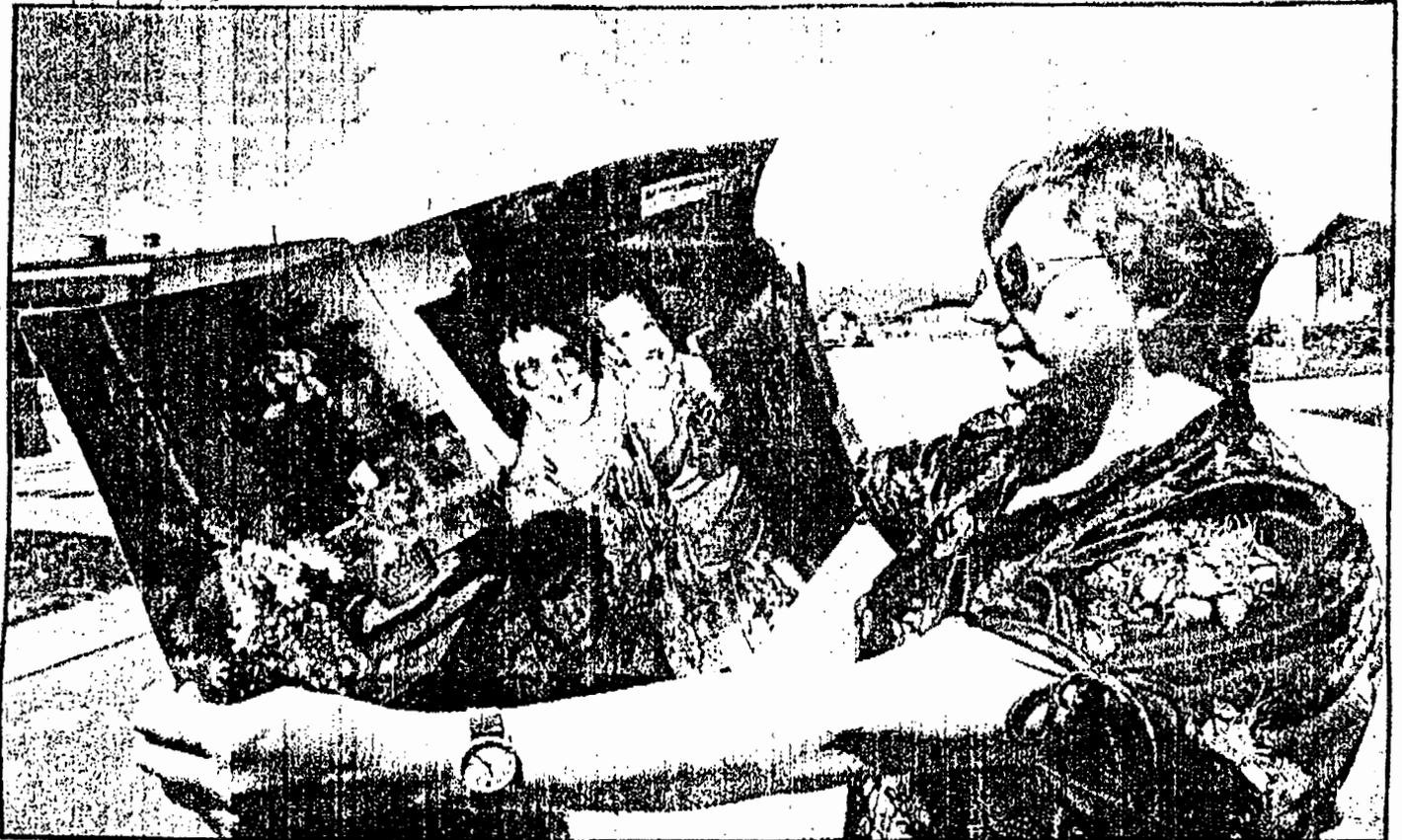
Bill Richardson
Member of Congress

Encl.

Los Alamos Tumor Mystery

Medical experts and residents look for clues as the list of brain-tumor victims in the Los Alamos area grows

7/14 A-I



NEIL JACOBS / JOURNAL

Shawnee Garrison looks at a 1987 photograph of herself with her daughter Bonnie Lee Kerns and her son Adam Mills.

Garrison was living in Los Alamos at the La Mesa Mobile Home Court, when her daughter died from a brain tumor.

By Tamar Stieber

OF THE JOURNAL'S NORTHERN BUREAU

LOS ALAMOS — They were more than a generation apart and never knew each other. But David Holm and Bonnie Kerns had several things in common.

Both lived in houses about two miles from the nuclear weapons laboratory where scientists made the first atomic bomb nearly half a century ago.

Both died of malignant brain tumors within the past four years. And both have been added to a growing list of residents and former residents who have died recently of such tumors.

One local doctor has counted nine people from Los Alamos County, which has a population of about 20,000, who have died since 1984 of primary malignant brain tumors — those that begin in the brain. Eight of those deaths were within a three-year period ending Dec. 31, 1990.

The physician, Dr. Jon Johnson, still has another 15 or so names he plans to check against medical records.

Nationwide, about four people for every 100,000 die each year of primary brain and central nervous system tumors, according to the National Cancer Institute in Bethesda, Md.

"As a physician who's practiced here for 12 years, something that's always struck me is that I've seen a lot more brain tumors . . . than I ever thought I'd see in my entire career," Johnson told a recent meeting of a newly formed committee called the Working Group to Address Los Alamos Community Health Concerns.

But Johnson, who specializes in cardiology, critical care and internal medicine, and other doctors are quick to add a note of caution.

They point out that the small population of the county makes statistical comparisons suspect, and that even if incidence of brain tumors is abnormally high, they say it's far too early to pinpoint a cause.

However, the federal government is

taking notice. It will sponsor a study to find out what, if anything, is wrong in Los Alamos.

John Puckett, leader of the Los Alamos National Laboratory's Health, Safety and Environment Division, said the lab monitors the environment for evidence of radioactive emissions — and none has shown up.

Epidemiologists and cancer experts agree a correlation exists between radiation and brain tumors. They also agree so little is known about brain tumors that it's hard to pinpoint a specific cause.

Puckett, who also is a member of the new community health committee, said he's looked personally and can't find any data showing a radiation-related accident or dangerous emissions level at the laboratory.

"What we do think at the lab is that there is a concern in the community," he said. "If there's concern in the community

MCRC See LIST on PAGE A8

TO: ✓ 6H - Lead DATE: 8-5-91
6T - coordinate

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1991 AUG -6 AM 10:25
ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY
CHARLOTTE, NC 28213

CONGRESSIONAL INQUIRY

PLEASE EXPEDITE

INSTRUCTIONS: PREPARE FINAL FOR SIGNATURE OF: Robert E. Layton Jr., P. E.
Regional Administrator

RETURN TO CHARLOTTE HEROD BY CLOSE OF BUSINESS: 8-9-91 *Firm*

List of Brain Tumor Victims Growing

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

then there's one in this lab and we have to address it."

The families of some brain tumor victims are more pointed in their comments.

Robert Holm and his son, Cliff, say they believe the lab is somehow to blame for David's death in 1989 at the age of 38.

Robert, who worked at the lab for nearly four decades, appears resigned. David's brother, Cliff, says "there's a little anger there."

"I feel like they cheated my brother of almost half his life by not being more attentive to the dangerous waste materials they were dealing with up there," he said.

Shawnee Garrison, whose daughter Bonnie Kerns died of a malignant primary brain tumor in 1987 at the age of 3, said she is no longer afraid to speak out against the lab even though her current husband works for security there.

"There's a lot of stuff wrong up here in Los Alamos that I don't think anyone wants to fix because it would be too costly. They've buried stuff all over the place," she said. "The lab is big here. If the lab leaves, this town goes under. Everybody in Northern New Mexico knows this."

ciér's readings to background radiation at the sites he had selected. More recently, the lab has said the difference could be caused by the way his monitoring devices were being analyzed.

After he spoke at the meeting about his findings, someone handed him a list with names of several people who reportedly had died of brain tumors or been recently diagnosed with them. He was asked if that was unusual.

"I made a note of it," Mercier, 34, recalled this week. "And as I began asking other people in the medical community and other areas, they added names to the list. It wasn't until I got hold of some epidemiologists and similar type of data down at the EID (state Environmental Improvement Division) library that I got concerned."

By last Oct. 19, Mercier had 12 people on his list. By May, he had 20.

"Since that time, it's just avalanched," said Mercier, noting the list began to grow quickly after New Mexico newspapers began covering his findings.

He said Saturday that of the 36 people now on his list, 29 are dead—27 over a three-year period from 1988 through 1990.

"I know others have been diagnosed," he said, mentioning two girls, ages 9 and 11. "But since I don't have the names, I didn't put them on the list."

not involve a brain tumor and the others were predominantly metastatic tumors that began elsewhere in the body and spread to the brain.

Excluding a woman who died in 1984, that comes to eight residents who died of brain tumors over a three-year period ending in 1990, or 2.6 per year during that time.

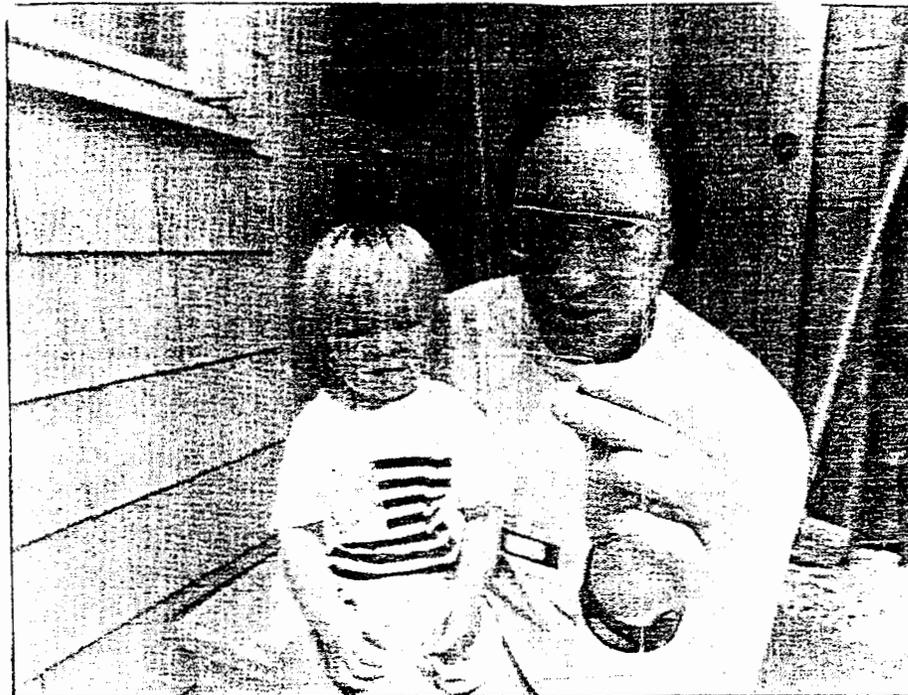
New Mexico's mortality rate for brain and central nervous system cancer from 1983 through 1987, according to the National Cancer Institute, averages 3.6 deaths a year for every 100,000 people (five times the population of Los Alamos County.)

An expert at the New Mexico Tumor Registry cautioned that statistics become less reliable with the smaller numbers.

Johnson said four of the seven Los Alamos people lived in a small section of town called Western Area, about 1½ miles north of the national laboratory's main technical area and built in 1947 to house scientists working on nuclear weapons. Three of the four lived on the same block. The others came from different parts of the community.

Mercier says his list shows two primary hot spots, including Western Area.

But Johnson, who knew many of the tumor victims from his own practice, said he expects the problem to be community-wide rather



NEIL JACOBS / JOURNAL

Tyler Mercier, at home with his 13-month-old son Daniel, displays the type of radiation monitoring device he set up in various locations in Los Alamos.

"We are not going to do that," he said. "From our standpoint, this is a research issue and we're dealing with it that way and we will make all the information fully available as soon as it has been analyzed."

Asked in a July 2 telephone interview whether the Tumor Registry knew about a possible cancer cluster in Los Alamos and, if so, had it alerted anyone, Kev responded with

said this week by phone.

Erasmus estimated his medical group, which includes three other neurosurgeons, sees five to 15 brain tumor patients a year with about one-third of those coming from Los Alamos. While he noted the proportion looks high, he warned the small numbers make it hard to draw conclusions.

"That's why an epidemiologist

Garrison said Bonnie was diagnosed with a malignant brain tumor in January 1986, two weeks before she turned 2. Doctors removed one tumor immediately, another in November and in December 1986, found several large tumors on the child's spine.

Bonnie, whom Garrison described as a "hellacious fighter," died in her

LANL Watchdog Fears He Was Radiated

By Tamar Stieber

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

LOS ALAMOS — Tyler Mercier, a sculptor who's collected nearly 50 names of possible brain tumor victims from this small county, believes he may have been exposed to a high dose of radiation last month and wants the nearby nuclear weapons laboratory to look into his findings.

But a spokesman for Los Alamos National Laboratory said Monday that Mercier's claim will prompt no action from the lab.

"This is Tyler's monitoring program," said nuclear engineer Joseph Graf, a member of a lab and community group

that LANL organized to investigate what appears to be a high incidence of brain tumors in Los Alamos County. "It doesn't mean if Tyler measures 15 (millirems of beta radiation) on a badge that I'm concerned enough to go and verify it."

Mercier has been conducting independent radiation monitoring in Los Alamos since last year. He and others suspect radiation from Los Alamos National Laboratory, the lab that produced the first atomic bomb, may be causing a local cluster of primary brain tumors — those that start in the brain.

Mercier said in a telephone interview Monday that a reading from his personal monitor, a clip-on device similar to those

used by LANL staff, indicates he was exposed last month to 14 millirems of beta radiation, a medium-penetration form of radiation.

Mercier said he's never received a beta reading greater than zero since he began monitoring the county for radiation 13 months ago.

The 14-millirem dose must have occurred on June 4, said Mercier, the only time last month he wore the personal monitor. That day he accompanied a LANL scientist and several technicians on a regional radiation survey. Officials from the U.S. Department of Energy, which funds Los Alamos National Laboratory, were also present, Mercier said.

The "ride-along" took three hours, said Mercier, one hour of which they spent near the corner of 45th Street and Sandia Drive, one of the brain tumor "hot spots."

Los Alamos physician Dr. Jon Johnson confirmed last week that three of the nine people that he and Dr. Lois Toevs, also of Los Alamos, identified so far as having died of primary brain tumors lived on 45th Street. The doctors have pulled records for 23 of the 48 names on Mercier's list.

Although Mercier believes the beta reading could mean an "imminent health hazard in the community," Graf dis-

MORE: See LANL on PAGE 3

Lab Watchdog Fears He Was Radiated

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

greed.

"It's not something I would worry about," he said. Noting that the monitor readings are for a period of a month, he said, "How can he pick out a three-hour period in that month and attribute the (beta reading) to that?"

Graf said 14 millirems is about half the total background radiation to which someone in New Mexico would normally be exposed in a month. He noted, however, that background radiation is mostly alpha and gamma radiation with very little beta, and called Mercier's 14 millirem beta reading "unusual."

"But I wouldn't call it a concern of

mine," he said. "I would call it an anomalous result."

In other words, said the scientist, laboratory readings from Mercier's monitor — a thermoluminescent dosimeter — have a margin of error of plus or minus 10 millirems. So even Mercier's earlier zero beta readings could mean he received up to 10 millirems, he explained.

But Mercier called the plus or minus system "hocus-pocus."

"You can't have negative radiation," he said. "It's an indication

that they're working with an experimental error that's inappropriate to the task."

Mercier acknowledged that TMA-Eberline, which analyses his radiation monitors, could have made a mistake.

"But it adds to me an even greater impetus that (Los Alamos National Laboratory) needs to do a survey," he said.

A TMA-Eberline representative did not return a call Monday afternoon.

Tumors Spur Call for Survey

CONTINUED FROM PAGE A1

him.

Mercier, 34, and others in the community have suggested radiation emissions from the lab, which produced the first atomic bomb, or from toxic waste sites may be responsible for the brain tumors.

Mercier also said his personal clip-on monitor registered for the first time exposure to beta radiation, which makes up a relatively small part of normal background radiation. He said he believes the exposure occurred last month during a one-hour visit to Western Area.

O'Toole said Mercier's 14-millirem beta reading deserves further investigation, though she said one instance is inconclusive.

"One reading means very little to me," she said. "I would tell you everything I'm telling you now about the need for a study even if we didn't have that reading. I don't think Tyler's reading gives the impetus that argues for a sophisticated and comprehensive study.

"It's the knowledge that there have been releases from Los Alamos in the past and that there is

current contamination of Los Alamos property from DOE documents."

The Department of Energy has agreed to pay for an independent epidemiological study of all cancers in Los Alamos, prompted by the concern about brain tumors. The New Mexico Department of Health and the New Mexico Tumor Registry will conduct the study.

"The DOE has a credibility problem when it comes to health issues," said O'Toole, one of three authors of a congressional report called "Complex Cleanup: The Environmental Legacy of Nuclear Weapons Production." The report, published in February by the U.S. Government Printing Office, was the result of an 18-month study by the Office of Technology Assessment.

"What we found and said in black and white is that DOE's assertions that there are no immediate health affects due to its (nuclear weapons) facilities are not scientifically substantiated," O'Toole said. "DOE has not investigated possible health effects of contamination."

Larry Hart, an Energy Department spokesman in Washington, D.C. said Tuesday evening that the his department's decision to fund an

independent epidemiology study in Los Alamos shows the agency's willingness to address health issues.

"The secretary of energy (James Watkins) is determined to address the concerns of the community as regards the health effects of the work we do," said Hart. "The Los Alamos study is a perfect example of addressing those concerns."

Hart said the Energy Department will fund the study even though there is as yet no "express scientific basis" for the community concern, referring to Tyler Mercier's brain tumor list. Mercier acknowledges that his data are from reliable hearsay. However, two Los Alamos physicians pulling individual medical records have confirmed that 22 of 23 people on Mercier's original list have died of some form of brain cancer.

Drs. Jon Johnson and Lois Toevs of Los Alamos have not yet checked on the names Mercier has added to his list. They confirmed that since 1984, nine people died from primary brain tumors, which start in the brain, including eight who died in a three-year period from 1988 through 1990.

Federal Agency To Investigate Tumors

By Tamar Stieber

JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

LOS ALAMOS — A federal health agency announced Wednesday night that it will work with the state to investigate a possible brain tumor cluster in the neighborhoods near the nuclear weapons laboratory here.

George Pettigrew, a Dallas representative of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, told a standing-room-only group of Los Alamos residents that he and his colleagues will provide "another set of faces to relate to and another agency to question."

Federal health officials and state environmental epidemiologist Dr. Millicent Eidson were unannounced guests at a meeting of the Working Group to Address Los Alamos Health Concerns.

The group, organized by the Los Alamos National Laboratory and

including people from the community, formed after a local artist began collecting names of Los Alamos residents who died from or were diagnosed with brain tumors.

Pettigrew and registry representatives were in northern New Mexico to look into possible lead poisoning in the Pecos area for which the state Health Department has been conducting tests.

Pettigrew said he didn't know about the Los Alamos brain tumor issue "until I picked up the paper this morning."

A registry administrator was quoted in a Journal story Wednesday saying the agency needed a written request from a resident before it could get involved in the study.

Eidson, who will be heading an epidemiological study for all cancers in Los Alamos when the U.S. Department of Energy gives final approval for funding, said the state

already had planned to have the federal agency involved.

"(The registry) has definitely committed to working with us on the study," she said. Eidson had invited the registry to participate.

Eidson said she is waiting for a final commitment from the DOE, which funds Los Alamos National Laboratory, to provide funding for the epidemiological study.

"I don't think there is any reason why it won't be funded," said Jerry Bellows, a Los Alamos representative from the DOE. "But it is headquarter's decision."

Eidson said the state is asking for about \$250,000 for the first year of the study and \$180,000 more for the following year should more time be necessary.

She said the first year will probably be spent reviewing the Los Alamos cancer rates and environmental data, including any collected by the lab community group.

"At the end of the year, if it looks like there are any excess cancers or outstanding questions, we'll go for another year," she said.

The Health Department's grant application to the DOE should be ready by next week, Eidson said.

In addition, said Eidson, she will meet with the working group to form a steering committee that will include some members of the Los Alamos working group.

The epidemiological study will try to determine if there is indeed a cluster of primary brain tumors in Los Alamos and, if so, what might be causing it.

Los Alamos sculptor Tyler Mercier, 34, began compiling his brain tumor list last August and, with others in the community, believes there is a tumor cluster that might be caused by radiation emissions from the lab or from local toxic waste sites.

Tumor study money not part of cleanup grant, officials say

7/25 A-4
By KATIE HICKOX

New Mexican Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A recent \$2.1 million federal grant to the state of New Mexico to help monitor environmental cleanup at Los Alamos National Laboratory is unrelated to the \$250,000 to be spent on a study of cancer rates in Los Alamos, officials said Wednesday.

Following a rash of reported deaths linked to brain tumors in Los Alamos, U.S. Energy Department and state Health Department officials announced they will study the area's cancer rates.

Millicent Eldson, an epidemiologist with the Health Department, estimates the initial stage of the cancer investigation will cost \$250,000 and take 15 months to complete.

The Energy Department is expected to pick up the tab for the study, which will be performed by Eldson and the Tumor Registry at the University of New Mexico's medical school.

The \$2.1 million federal grant to New Mexico is to pay for state oversight of Energy Department cleanup efforts at Los Alamos and Sandia national laboratories.

The \$2.1 million federal grant and the \$250,000 health study "have nothing to do with each other," said Larry Hart, a spokesman for the Energy Department. "The health study is completely different from an environmental study."

Although the \$2.1 million federal grant to New Mexico was not announced until this week, the Department of Energy earlier had said it would provide the funds.

The money will be used by the state over a five-year period to hire experts to watch over cleanup of hundreds of sites at Los Alamos and Sandia. The sites are contaminated by radioactive waste, hazardous waste or a combination of both.

Katie Hickox is a reporter for States News Service.

The list that has raised so many questions in Los Alamos is the work of sculptor Tyler Mercier, who last August began to compile names of residents who died of brain tumors or had been diagnosed with them.

The impetus came at a public meeting about a new plutonium processing plant for Los Alamos during which Mercier announced he was finding higher levels of radionium at sites he was monitoring independently than lab scientists were finding at other similar sites.

The levels weren't high enough to be a health hazard, although Mercier says they've since risen to dangerous levels.

The lab initially attributed Mer-

cion to have the names. I didn't put them on the list."

Mercier repeatedly stressed that his name-gathering is not scientific but is mostly from reliable hearsay — immediate family or multiple reports about the same person.

Drs. Johnson and Lois Toevs of Los Alamos became interested in Mercier's findings and joined the Working Group to Address Los Alamos Community Health Concerns.

Pulling medical charts for 20 names on his list, they came up with seven people in Los Alamos and two in White Rock who died of primary malignant brain tumors within the past few years. Of the rest, one did

not have the names. I didn't put them on the list."

The committee on Los Alamos health concerns was organized by the laboratory and comprises residents, doctors and lab representatives. It was formed after Mercier, who is also a member, began to discuss his findings.

The committee is working with the Department of Energy, the government agency responsible for the lab, to determine if there is a higher incidence of brain tumors in Los Alamos and, if so, why.

The energy department has agreed to sponsor an epidemiological study by the state health department and the New Mexico Tumor Registry in Albuquerque, part of the Cancer Center at the University of New Mexico Medical Center.

The registry is one of nine SEER — Surveillance, Epidemiology and End Result Program — groups in the United States funded by the National Cancer Institute to collect cancer data.

Gene Runkle, director of the Health Protection Division at the DOE's Albuquerque office, said Friday the study will look at all cancers in Los Alamos.

"The epidemiology work we're developing with the state will take a little time to get a contract in place but we really do understand the community's concern in this area," Runkle said.

The federal agency and state health officials will say only that the numbers merit investigation.

Dr. C. Mack Sewell, state epidemiologist, was asked whether Los Alamos appears to have a higher rate of brain tumors than other parts of New Mexico or the nation.

His response: "I don't want to get into that just yet. I think that's information we can share once we've had a chance to do a lot of different comparisons."

Dr. Charles Key, head of the Tumor Registry, declined last week to release the brain tumor statistics his office has been collecting for the state, along with other cancer statistics, since 1969.

He said he expects the problem to be community-wide rather than limited to a few places.

The statistics Key declined to release appear to be public information. UNM Medical Center spokeswoman Gail Sutton assured the Journal late last week that the information would be forthcoming.

Many specialists the Journal contacted in New Mexico and out-of-state believe Mercier could be on to something significant.

Among them is Gregg Wilkinson, former group leader for the epidemiology department at Los Alamos National Laboratory from 1980 to 1987. He was one of the authors of a study of mortality among those who worked with plutonium at Rocky Flats Nuclear Weapons Plant.

"I think it's evidence of a cluster of brain tumors," said Wilkinson, now chief of the Division of Epidemiology and Biostatistics at the University of Texas Medical Branch at Galveston. But whether that will bear out when other facts are looked to is still open to question.

Dr. Arthur Forman, a clinical neurologist and professor of oncology at the University of Texas M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, said he spoke to a member of the Los Alamos lay group investigating the tumors. He said that what he heard was "disturbing."

"From what she told me, there's more than just a few," Forman said. "It's fairly compelling evidence that something is going on."

He added, "I don't know the causes of it. Brain tumors certainly are relatively infrequent occurrences — only 11,000 new cases per year. To have a cluster like that is a concern."

Dr. Mark Erasmus, an Albuquerque neurosurgeon, wasn't ready to label anything in Los Alamos a cluster. But he said he's felt a disproportionate number of his brain tumor patients come from the scientific community.

"It's always been my impression that I've seen a lot of people with brain tumors from Los Alamos," he

said. "That's why an epidemiologist has to look at this," he said. Aware of the planned epidemiology study to be sponsored by DOE, Erasmus noted that the conclusions could certainly disprove his hunch. But, he said, "I think the numbers are going to be there."

Shawnee Garrison said she hasn't been "into talking about" her 3-year-old daughter since she died of a malignant brain tumor in May 1987.

Then Garrison started reading about Tyler Mercier and his list of brain tumor victims and called him on July 5.

"When Tyler started raising the questions, I wondered, 'Hey, is Bonnie's name on the list,'" Garrison, 34, said in a telephone interview from her current home on Alabama Avenue in North Communities.

Garrison, whose daughter wasn't on the list, said newspaper articles about Mercier's research forced her to confront what she'd been avoiding for four years.

"It got me to thinking, 'Hell, I just lived two canyons from the DP site,'" she said, referring to a plutonium processing facility, no longer active, just south of the Los Alamos Airport. "I used to wax my cars down there by the Los Alamos ice rink in Omega Canyon. That's where I grew up."

Garrison said she's lived in Los Alamos since she was 2 years old. Bonnie's father, her first husband, Jack L. Kerns, was born and raised in Los Alamos.

was again, died in her father's home on May 21, 1987, at her parents' North Mesa mobile home.

David Holm would have been 41 this year. He died in his adopted home of Aurora, Colo., in 1989, about six years after he was diagnosed with a primary malignant brain tumor. He'd moved to Aurora in 1975, two years after he left Los Alamos, where he and his brother, Clifford, were born and raised.

David's father, Robert, was an electrical technician at the lab for nearly 40 years. Robert said he believes his first wife — David's mother, Betty — may also have had a brain tumor. She took her life in 1965.

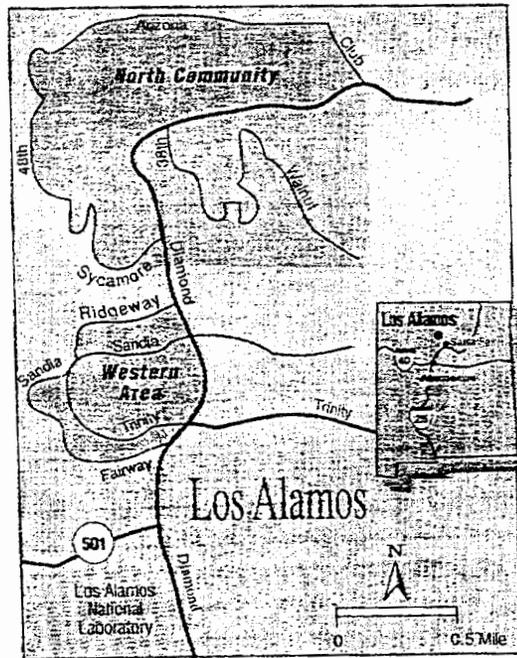
Robert said this week that his wife had several of the same symptoms David had — trembling hands, headaches and personality changes — before she shot herself with a .22-caliber pistol.

The Holms lived in a bungalow on 34th Street near the Aspen Elementary School. Cliff said David would skirt "Acid Canyon" — a drainage arm of the much larger Pueblo Canyon which bisects Los Alamos — as a shortcut from their neighborhood to the downtown area. David and a few of his buddies even occasionally wandered into the canyon to play, Cliff said.

"I told him it was a silly idea," said Cliff, 38, recalling the radiation warning signs at the top of the canyon. The bottom wasn't marked, he said. "I'd seen those signs at the top end of the canyon and figured if it was radioactive there, it probably was at the bottom."

"I don't know the causes of it. Brain tumors certainly are relatively infrequent occurrences — only 11,000 new cases per year. To have a cluster like that is a concern."

— Dr. Arthur Forman
M.D. Anderson Cancer Center





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NORTHE

Congress Adviser Seeks Los Alamos Tumor Study

By Tamar Steiber

OF THE JOURNAL'S NORTHERN BUREAU

SANTA FE — A federal agency should hasten to conduct a radiation survey in Los Alamos because of a possible brain tumor cluster in neighborhoods near the nuclear weapons laboratory, a physician with a congressional advisory agency said Tuesday.

But Dr. Tara O'Toole of the Office of Technology Assessment said that while the U.S. Department of Energy, which funds Los Alamos National

laboratory, has the most expertise to conduct such a study, "the problem is that nobody believes the DOE."

"I think the concern is significant enough from what I understand among citizens that some responsible governmental agency ought to consider. . . . doing radiation monitoring in these neighborhoods," O'Toole, a senior analyst for the bi-partisan scientific agency, said in a telephone interview from Washington, D.C.

The neighborhoods to which

O'Toole refers are the Western Area west of downtown Los Alamos, and North Community, immediately north of Western Area. Both are a few miles north of the main complex of the weapons lab.

Tyler Mercier, a Los Alamos scientist collecting names of people who died from or have been diagnosed with brain tumors, says a disproportionate number are residents or former residents of those two sections, including three who lived on the same street. Mercier's list has 48 people on it.

O'Toole said the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry in Atlanta, Ga., has "legal authority" to hold environmental and epidemiological studies in Los Alamos. The Atlanta agency is part of the U.S. Public Health Service.

Part of the registry's mission is to make available to the public data on the health effects of hazardous substances.

The registry was created in 1980 by Superfund legislation, a toxic waste cleanup program run by the U.S. Environmental Protection

Agency. Under the law, the EPA drew up a list of priority cleanup sites and is to update the list annually.

"Right now we're a little hampered with regard to Los Alamos," said Mark Bashor, an administrator for the registry.

Bashor said Los Alamos National Laboratory is not one of the 16 Department of Energy sites on the EPA's priority list. According to an agreement with the Energy Department, he explained, his agency cannot automatically step in to do a

study there.

However, Bashor said the registry would act "within minutes" of receiving a letter from any citizen or physician requesting that it investigate environmental health hazards in Los Alamos.

"I mean within minutes, if it's something of this magnitude," he said. "It sounds like a good bit of public concern," commenting on information, including newspaper articles, that O'Toole recently sent

MORE: See TUMORS on PAGE A6

Bill & Ride

① Have we already provided all this info to ATSDR or will we? Add cc: Barry Johnson, ATSDR

Done

② Capitalize "Canyon" ~~in~~ in all places

③ Have we checked Emergency Response Hotline + TRI data for releases? Any release info there must be included also.

④ If some of the cited reports are out of the Part B application, reference it. None

⑤ Betty will redo the HRS paragraphs bring to you.

Pls let me see changes & return this note with them.

LWKH 2/13

See Ken Copies