

North Suwannee

County Health Project

News

November 2002 North Suwannee County Project Newsletter
from the Suwannee County Health Department



Florida Department of Health Gives an Update on the Health Project Located in Live Oak, FL.

On October 16, 2002, approximately 50 to 60 people attended a town hall meeting at the Econo Lodge in Live Oak. Senator Richard Mitchell sponsored this meeting for residents in north Suwannee County to express their concerns to the Florida Department of Health (DOH) and Florida Department of Environmental Protection (DEP).

Residents Express Their Concerns A number of people living in north Suwannee County told of illnesses they and their families have experienced. They told of their many health concerns.

Many people expressed concern that their underground water supply may be contaminated. Residents asked DEP to conduct additional testing at a site in the community that DEP had tested in the past.

Sen. Mitchell asked residents to provide their names, addresses, a list of their family members, and the health problems they have had. This informal survey will present a clear picture to the agencies of the health issues people have experienced.

When the drinking water and environmental testing is completed, the data will be compiled and analyzed.

DOH and DEP Respond to Residents Although past environmental testing in the area did not find dangerous levels of contamination, DEP Northeast District Director Ernie Frey said DEP would conduct more testing. Frey

said DEP would begin taking additional samples of both soil and underground water at the site residents are concerned about. DEP staff talked with residents to determine where they had observed dumping.

Sharon Heber, Director of DOH Division of Environmental Health, told residents that DOH and Suwannee County Health Department (CHD) will look for connection between the symptoms they described and possible contaminants.

Suwannee CHD and DOH tested private drinking water wells Monday, November 4, and again on Thursday, November 7. DOH/CHD tested all wells within 1/4 mile of the site.

If samples show contamination in these wells, Suwannee CHD and DOH will then test additional wells further from the site to determine appropriate steps.

Test Results Take Time While everyone—residents, Suwannee CHD, and DOH—want quick results from the sampling, it usually takes three to four weeks to get the

Testing of Children Many residents expressed concerns about their children's blood and urine test results. Some said they were concerned because they did not know what the findings mean to their children's health. Residents or physicians having questions about laboratory tests may call Tammy Williams, Epidemiology Nurse at the Suwannee CHD, 362-2708, Extension 238. She can give information on metals and other chemicals found in blood, urine, and hair.

laboratory results. DOH has contacted the laboratory requesting a higher priority for this sampling.

Suwannee CHD will notify residents of the test results and assist with their interpretation.

Sampling Tests Samples are being analyzed for metals, solvents, nitrates, pesticides, and E. coli bacteria. “Metals” are types of chemicals. The metals include lead, aluminum, mercury, chromium, and arsenic. Solvents can be petroleum products, or other chemicals such as trichloroethylene (TCE) and tetrachloroethylene (PERC). TCE and PERC are cleaning solvents. Nitrates can be from fertilizers and septic tanks. E. coli bacteria is found in human and animal feces. Each of these can indicate of possible contamination.

Public Health Assessment When the test results are available, the Suwannee CHD and DOH will examine the results for a possible connection to residents’ health concerns. In cooperation with the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), they will identify known health effects from exposure to contaminants found in the area. DOH will distribute its report to residents.

If the samples show a connection between residents’ health concerns and environmental contamination, Suwannee CHD and DOH can apply to ATSDR for federal funds for further investigation.

The U.S. ATSDR is the agency Suwannee CHD and DOH request the funds. ATSDR requires that the requesting agencies show the presence of a toxin and a public health risk before it will consider funding additional testing.

Site Testing and Cleanup Questions For more information about environmental testing, contact Michael Fitzsimmons, DEP Project Manager, in Jacksonville at (904) 807-3354.

For Health Questions and Concerns If you have additional health questions or concerns, you may contact Larry Williams, Suwannee CHD Environmental Health Director, 362-2708, Extension 293; or Shaun Crawford, DOH Tallahassee, toll free: 877-798-2772.

Website Information For information on DOH public health assessments, see our website: www9.myflorida.com/environment/hsee/Superfund/

For information on DEP environmental testing, see the DEP website: www.dep.state.fl.us/waste/categories/wc/default.htm