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Contact: Dr. David Garabrant

Telephone: (734) 936 0753

Email: dhg@umich.edu

U-M DIOXIN RESEARCHERS TO MEET WITH COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

ANN ARBOR, Michigan -- University of Michigan scientists studying human exposure to dioxins in the Midland-Saginaw area are scheduled to meet June 9 in Freeland, Michigan, with community representatives to discuss the study.

Dr. David Garabrant, who heads the U-M scientific team, will give a progress report to the study's Community Advisory Panel. He's expected to focus on letters that are being sent to some residents of the Midland-Saginaw area giving them the results of University of Michigan tests of house dust for the presence of dioxins.

Garabrant cautions that these results are very preliminary -- and people who receive them should not jump to conclusions.

"We need to know the relationship between levels of dioxins in soil, household dust and blood for all the study participants, both those in the Midland-Saginaw area and a separate group, for comparison, in Jackson and Calhoun counties," Garabrant said.

"Only then can we draw scientifically valid conclusions as to whether any increased levels of dioxins in people are directly due to increased levels in their environment."

Since Sept. 30, U-M field researchers have been collecting samples of soil and dust from households and blood from household residents. More than 1,000 Michigan residents are being contacted to take part in the study. Results are to be published in late 2006.

The purpose of the U-M scientific study is to see whether elevated levels of dioxins in the environment are ending up in the bodies of residents of the Tittabawassee River basin and whether these residents have higher levels of dioxins in their blood than persons living in other parts of Michigan.

Dioxins are considered to be toxic chemicals. They can be produced by industrial and combustion activities. There are known to be elevated levels of dioxin in the soil of the Tittabawassee River flood plain and nearby areas that are affected by discharges from the Dow Chemical Company plant in Midland.

The role of the Community Advisory Panel is to make sure that the U-M team of scientists is aware of the concerns of the public and answers their questions about the study.

The June 9 meeting begins at 6 p.m. It is being held at the Freeland Elementary School Cafeteria, 710 Powley Drive, Freeland. The meeting is open to the public.

The Chairperson of the Community Advisory Panel is Veronica Horn, Executive Vice President of the Saginaw County Chamber of Commerce. Vice Chairperson is Jenee Velasquez, Chief Executive Officer of Midland Tomorrow.

Panel members include Peter Boyse, President of Delta College; Craig Douglas, Superintendent of Carrollton Public Schools; Rick Hayes, Committee Chair of Tittabawassee Parks; Gary Hughes, Superintendent of Midland Public Schools; Brian Kischnick, Tittabawassee Township Manager; Michael Krecek, Director/Health Officer of the Midland County Health Department; Rev. Wallace Mayton of Memorial Presbyterian Church; Neill Varner, Medical Director of the Saginaw County Department of Community Health; and Allen Veenkant, Superintendent of the Freeland Community School District.

Dr. David Garabrant, head of the U-M study, is Professor of Environmental Health Sciences, Professor of Epidemiology, and Associate Professor of Emergency Medicine at the University of Michigan.

The results of the U-M dioxin study, to be published in late 2006, will not identify individual participants.

The U-M study does not look at health effects, but rather the level of human exposure to dioxins. "First we need to get the facts about exposure," Garabrant said. "Then decisions can be made about what to do next."

Dow Chemical is funding the U-M study but has no say over how it is conducted. The study is controlled entirely by the University of Michigan.

Garabrant said, "we will make sure this University of Michigan study is of the highest integrity and independence."

More details about the study are available on its website, <http://www.umdioxin.org>

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