

## **Dow won't influence study**

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**DR. DAVID GARABRANT**

GUEST COLUMNIST

As a medical doctor, I know that one of the best ways to address concerns about health and the environment is to first get the facts. There have been many concerns about dioxins from the Dow Chemical Co. facilities in Midland contaminating Tittabawassee River sediments. There has been much discussion over the years. Now, at last, we're about to take the first big step to get the facts about human exposure to these toxic chemical compounds.

Later this year, I and my team of University of Michigan scientists will begin a study of residents of Saginaw, Midland and Bay counties to see if dioxins in the soil are ending up in their bodies. This will be a massive study, and we hope it will answer some of the many questions people have. It won't look at health effects but it will determine whether residents near the river have more dioxins in their blood than people elsewhere -- a key fact we all need to know first before taking further steps.

How will we do the study?

We'll be asking randomly selected residents in the Tittabawassee River floodplain and nearby areas for permission for our scientists to collect samples of soil and dust from their homes, and blood from one adult in the home. We'll see if dioxins in soil and dust are reflected in their blood. To see whether this is a local occurrence or more widespread, we will also compare these local soil, dust and blood samples with those of a representative sample in Jackson and Calhoun counties. A total of 700 residents in five Michigan counties will be recruited for this 24-month study.

The names, addresses and other information of study participants will be kept confidential. Any participant who would like to know his or her results will be given that information -- and again it will be confidential, as is always the case with such University of Michigan research. The final published results will not identify individuals.

To guarantee the integrity and independence of our research, our study plan has been approved by a University of Michigan Institutional Review Board. We are complying with federal and U-M rules that apply to research using human subjects. To further assure integrity and independence, the University of Michigan has appointed a Scientific Advisory Board of distinguished scientists from across the nation to review our survey

methods and procedures. In addition, we've appointed a Community Advisory Panel of local citizens to make sure that our scientists are aware of concerns of the public and answers their questions.

This is one of the biggest and costliest such studies ever, and is funded by a grant of more than \$15 million to the University of Michigan from the Dow Chemical Co. Dow has no say over how we conduct the research or publish the findings. The University of Michigan has total control over this research project. It's not unusual for companies to fund university research that may have an effect on the companies themselves, and there's no guarantee for the company that the outcome will be favorable. Quite the contrary. For example, I did research funded by the Rohm & Haas chemical company, and I published results that showed their DDT was associated with pancreatic cancer. The dioxins study, of course, will not look at health effects but will have the same type of independence.

We expect to complete our data gathering in 2005 and to finish analyses by the middle of 2006. In late 2006, the results will be made public, in a variety of settings including our Web site ([www.umdioxin.org](http://www.umdioxin.org)) and at public meetings. No matter what the outcome, whether unfavorable to Dow or not, the results will be published.

And then we will know the facts about human exposure to dioxins here. We will know whether living in the floodplain does or does not put Michiganders at risk. Knowing the facts through good, solid science will benefit all of us. t

Dr. David Garabrant is a University of Michigan professor of environmental health sciences, professor of epidemiology and associate professor of emergency medicine. His research team is studying the effects of dioxin exposure in the Tittabawassee River floodplain.