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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 December 9 in Freeland, Michigan, with community representatives to discuss the study.

Dr. David Garabrant, who heads the U-M scientific team, is expected to tell the study's 12-member Community Advisory Panel that the study has been proceeding well since it began Sept. 30.

"We're getting a very high rate of participation among local residents we have contacted who are eligible to take part in this study," he said. "And we are obtaining more soil/dust and blood samples than we had projected. So far, so good."

Nearly 80% of households with residents eligible to participate in the study have agreed to be interviewed, and among those also eligible to provide blood samples over 90% agreed to have blood drawn. Virtually all households where blood is being drawn have also agreed to have dust from their homes sampled and soil samples from their property collected by U-M field researchers.

An estimated 1100 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 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.

This University of Michigan study is funded by the Dow Chemical company but, to ensure independence, Dow has no say over it. All decisions about how to do the study and report the results to the public are being made by the University of Michigan team.

"We recognize the importance of the issue, and, as with all of our research, we will make sure this University of Michigan study is of the highest integrity and independence," Garabrant said.

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 Dec. 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, Executive Director 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; Pastor David Saunders of Bethel A.M.E.; 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 published results of the U-M dioxin study, 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."

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

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