

March 30, 2006

Governor Blagojevich
207 State House
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Lt. Governor Pat Quinn
214 State House
Springfield, Illinois 62706

Subject: Health concerns regarding the health of communities in the vicinities of the Braidwood and Dresden nuclear power plants

Dear Governor Blagojevich and Lt. Governor Quinn;

This letter concerns the harm that is being done to the health of people in communities south of Chicago in the areas near the Braidwood and Dresden nuclear power plants. Over the past several months, federal, state, and county authorities and the public have been informed that accidental releases of radionuclides from the Braidwood plant have occurred since the mid 1990's, with multiple spills of up to 3 million gallons. The IEPA has acknowledged water levels of tritium beneath the Dresden plant were 5,000 times the acceptable level and communications this year with that agency indicated ongoing contamination high levels. As health professionals, we felt these events mandated re-addressing the significant decline in the health of the people living in communities near the reactors. While not attributing any health damage to the plants at this time, we have reviewed cancer rates and critical sentinel measures of children's health that have been linked to radiation in scientific studies.

We analyzed data from the IDPH website, using a screening analysis that employs commonly used measures of children's health, including infant mortality, low birth weight, and birth defects. These have all increased substantially in Grundy County during the time span from the early 1990s to the late 1990s. The decline in health occurred in spite of improvements in prenatal care and the general health habits of women, all serving to improve birth outcomes and infant health. During the most recent reporting period, the rate of infant deaths was twice as high in Grundy County as it had been in the early 1990s. The rates of low birth weight and birth defects had increased by 50%. All of these findings were communicated to, and dismissed by the Grundy County Health Department and the IDPH over the last two years. (Written communications provided on request).

During the same time period, the 24 communities within 15 miles of the reactors experienced a rise in the leukemia rate by 43% and in the rate of cancers of the nervous system by 75%. The medical practitioners treating children and adults from these areas have expressed considerable concern about the rates and the dramatic increase in cancer incidence. Physicians from Children's Memorial Hospital in Chicago and Hope Childrens Hospital, where most of the childhood cancers are treated, have echoed these concerns. There are over 90,000 people in these communities and it is imperative that this situation be addressed.

We realize analyses have been done by IDPH and have serious concerns about the methods used. Likewise, statements regarding cancer mortality provided by the Will County Health Department, in consultation with IDPH, focus on outcomes that are not appropriate for identification of radiation-related health damage and do not adequately address the decline in critical measures of health during the last 10 years.

We are concerned that the needs of the public are not being served and that public health is not being protected. A summary sheet of key facts is attached. We can provide more detailed information on request. We urge you to take this very seriously.

We are aware that findings could have significant economic and political implications, and so strongly urge the formation of a scientific review board that is independent of the pressures that may exist within the state. This should be composed of radiation, cancer, pediatric, and other health specialists from outside the state who are not affiliated with government agencies, so that they can conduct an objective review of the statistics.

It is imperative that the extent and causes of the declining health of the people of Will and Grundy County be identified as soon as possible. The worsening trend in health cannot be reversed until we identify and correct the underlying problem. The critical first step in this process is to recognize that a problem exists. Currently, women in these communities are erecting a statue to honor the many children who have died. We hope that in the very near future, the communities can be assured that they will no longer be experiencing these epidemics and parents can look at their children with happiness rather than fear. The most fundamental right that we enjoy and expect within the United States is safety in our own homes. Unfortunately, there are many in Illinois who are no longer sure they are safe.

We thank you for your time in considering this and look forward to working with you to restore both the health of the people and the confidence they have in those appointed to protect them.

Sincerely,

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Encl

cc:

Lisa Madigan, Illinois Attorney General

Gregory Jaszko, NRC Commissioner

Dr. John Raffensperger, Children Memorial Hospital

Dr. Tad Tomita - Children's Memorial Hospital

Senator John McCain

Senator Harry Reid

Joe Cosgrove, Director Godley Park District

Kurt Leinweber, Esq., Wilmington, Illinois

Kathleen Veldhuzien, Grundy County Department of Health

Alpesh Patel, Will County Department of Health

Tiefu Shen, Illinois Department of Public Health

Senator Obama, Illinois

Senator Durbin, Illinois

Senator Markey, Massachusetts

Representative Weller, Illinois

Children's Health and Cancer Statistics for Communities and Counties Near the Braidwood and Dresden Reactors: Changes from the Early to Late 1990s

The following summary focuses on infant health and cancers that have been scientifically linked to radiation and pollution. For brevity, we provide a sample of health statistics, comparing the early 1990s to late 1990s, including information on Grundy and Will Counties and on 24 communities within 15 miles of the Braidwood and Dresden reactors.

Children's Health

Children's health indicators often include infant deaths, low birth weight, and birth defects, which are described below for Grundy County.

Grundy County's rate of infant deaths doubled from the early to late 1990s. The rate is now 50% higher than the state rate of 6.4. (1990-94: 4.8 per 1000 births compared to 1996-2000: 9.4 per 1000 births)

Grundy County babies born with very low weights (under 3.3 pounds) increased 50 percent from the early to late 1990s. (1990-1994: 7.81 per 1000 births compared to 1995 to 2001: 11.6 per 1000)

Grundy County babies with birth defects increased by almost 50 percent from early to late 1990s. (1992-1996: 21.8 per 1000 births compared to 1998-2002: 31.9 per 1000 births)

Cancer

We hope to review childhood cancer rates, but require additional data from IDPH. The cancer rates below combine all ages. Rates are the number of people diagnosed per 100,000 people per year.

The brain cancer rate in Grundy County women increased by more than 400% from the early to late 1990s. The rate in men did not go up substantially. The rate in Grundy County women is now 73% higher than the national rate. (1988-1992: 2.5 compared to 1998-2002: 10.4)

The leukemia rate Grundy County increased by 237% in men and 33% in women from the early to late 1990s, while the state rates did not increase substantially. (1988-1992: 12.5 in men and 12.2 in women; 1992-2002: 29.6 in men and 16 in women)

The leukemia rate in Will County went up over 30% in men and 10% in women from the early to late 1990s. (1988-1992 = 13.9 men and 9.6 women; 1998-2002 = 18.2 in men and 10.5 in women)

In the 24 communities within 15 miles of the Dresden and Braidwood reactors:

- nervous system cancer incidence increased by 75%
- leukemia increased by 43%

Radiation is a well-established risk factor for both of these cancers. During the same period Illinois rate of nervous system cancer declined, and the leukemia rate did not increase substantially.

* The IDPH website numbers are listed in parentheses. Some rates were calculated using IDPH data and the 1990 and 2000 US Census Data because rates takes into account population growth in the area. Data source: www.idph.state.il.us/cancer/statistics.htm