

# Public health study wanted

## INDUSTRY AIMS TO PUT AN END TO SPECULATION

By CATHY DOBSON  
The Observer

An association of 19 major industries in Sarnia-Lambton wants the federal government to launch a comprehensive public health study and put an end to what it calls "speculative" media reports.

Scott Munro of the Sarnia-Lambton Environmental Association (SLEA) said his members — which include Dow, Nova, Imperial and Shell — want Health Canada to determine if the health of the local population is any different from the rest of the province.

"And if it is, we want to find out the causes," Munro said. "If there are connections between industry and health, then we could address them."

To date, there have been only "bits and pieces" of evidence that Sarnia-Lambton residents may have unique health concerns related to their environment, Munro said.

"A great deal of what's out there is only speculation," he said. "There's preliminary information that tells us there is cause for concern but there's been no proper study."

At SLEA's urging, four local politicians are meeting with Health Canada officials today at the county's headquarters in Wyoming.

Mayor Mike Bradley, Point Edward Mayor Dick Kirkland, St. Clair Mayor Joe Dedecker and Lambton Warden Jim Burns will discuss the possibilities of a community-wide study.

"There have been many anecdotal media reports but no comprehensive look at health in our community," Bradley said. "A scientific study would give us a more accurate idea so we can deal with fact."

Numerous studies have been released over the years related to everything from local cancer rates to asthma and other smog-related ailments.

Most recently, the results of a 2005 study on Aamjiwnaang First Nation birth ratios have put Sarnia on the worldwide map with startling evidence that fewer boys are being born in a community virtually surrounded by one of Canada's largest petrochemical industry complexes.

But there is no explanation for the decline and no study done on the causes.

Munro said that if there is a connection between industrial practices and public health his members want to know.

In fact, they'll even help pay for a study.

The Aamjiwnaang data demands a full study and analysis, he said. "We've got a real concern that media reports are done on the basis of speculation rather than fact."

In the case of declining birth ratios, news outlets as far away as Scotland and New Zealand have reported on the concerns.

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Jim Brophy at the local Occupational Health Clinic for Ontario Workers assisted with the 2005 study with the First Nation community. He agrees additional research by a third party is warranted.

"I'm surprised Health Canada has seemingly been so silent until now. I would welcome a serious evaluation of health in the Sarnia-Lambton community," he said. "We know there are serious reasons to be concerned about the health of the population here."

But if Health Canada agrees to do a study, Brophy doesn't want Chemical Valley industries involved in funding it on any level.

"The petrochemical industry internationally has a record of protecting its markets, so I have concerns about the Environmental Association paying the bill," he said.

On the other hand, industry as well as every other sector within the Sarnia-Lambton community should have input, Brophy said.

"The study should be done by the government with industry at the table, as well as other community stakeholders."

Munro agreed.

SLEA also wants a community-based steering committee to work with Health Canada.

"Our expectation is that a steering committee would include industry, activists, community groups and the Sarnia-Lambton Environmental Association," he said.