

New study supports Pt. Hope cancer claim

Results of a two-year medical study of cancer in Pt. Hope indicate that contrary to earlier medical reports, the high rate of cancer in the northwest village is likely not linked to lifestyle changes.

The North Slope Borough initiated the study after revelations about the 1962 Project Chariot radioactive field experiments and the use of Native subjects for Iodine 131 radiation experiments heightened existing concerns about unusually high cancer rates in Point Hope. The study was conducted by Dr. Ron Bowerman, the borough's epidemiologist and medical director. Bowerman attempted to establish likely causes for Pt. Hope's cancer rate by examining cases over a 26-year period and comparing risk factors affecting cancer patients with those of a control group. The results challenge conventional explanations for a local cancer rate that has been higher than the national average in recent years.

Bowerman says he was surprised by the results. He expected to find a clear link between the elevated incidence of cancer and increased smoking or other lifestyle risks. Instead, he found no significant difference in the cancer rate among those who smoked and those who didn't. Nor did dietary choices, alcohol use, family history or past occupation affect the comparative cancer incidence. Residence in Pt. Hope seemed to be the only common factor, Bowerman said.

"The usual explanations for high cancer rates don't seem to fit the situation in Pt. Hope. The results of this study point away from lifestyle or family history and raise the question of environmental causes," said Bowerman. He added that the study raises more questions than it answers.

"You have to interpret the results of this study with caution because of the small number of subjects in-

Page 8, please

Point Hope . . .

Continued from page 1

volved. But these results are not what one would expect, so it raises flags. What else in the environment could be responsible? We need to continue investigating," he said.

Some Pt. Hope residents suspect leftover radioactive material from Project Chariot experiments is the most likely source of the cancer problem. Even after the cleanup of the Chariot site in 1993, the vast majority of radioactive material brought to the site has never been accounted for, according to borough officials. Borough Mayor George Ahmaogak said he would like to see local people have more control over future research efforts.

Local residents have begun to participate in the research loop, according to NSB spokesman David Harding. After the Chariot revelations, a borough-sponsored committee of scientists recommended installation of an air monitoring station at the village to track any changes in radiation levels. The U.S. Dept. of Energy agreed to fund the equipment and earlier this month, technicians from the Los Alamos National Laboratory installed a monitoring device at the Pt. Hope City Hall. Residents will operate the equipment and data will appear on a local computer at the same time it is transmitted to Los Alamos for evaluation.