

METRO

BP lab linked to cancer

Long study fails to find exact cause

By MARK SKERTIC
SHERMAN REPORTER

Maybe it was some chemical. Maybe radiation. Maybe no one will ever know. After studying an outbreak of fatal brain tumors at its largest U.S. research complex in Naperville, BP Amoco said Thursday it has found a statistical link between the disease and something on the third-floor laboratory of Building 500.

But it has yet to find the cause. "I don't know if we'll ever know," said Jim Lowry of the BP Amoco task force.

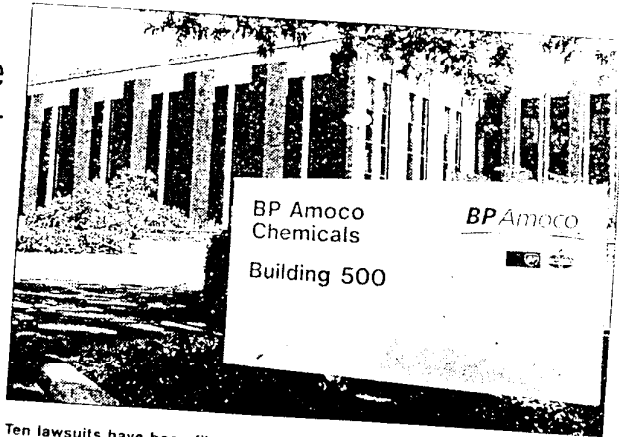
Researchers from two universities hired by Amoco could only conclude that work done in the building may have led to six cases of glioma, a deadly cancer that affects nerves in the brain. The glioma rate in Building 500 is eight times the national average.

Acknowledging a possible link may not seem like much of an admission, but in scientific circles it is a major step. The researchers said they had found statistical evidence that some chemicals used in the laboratory may have caused the deadly brain cancers.

"It's frustrating to spend three years studying something and not have any definitive answers to give," Lowry said.

Victims' relatives are also frustrated. "What they're concluding about the cases is probably less strong than what my experts concluded a year ago," said attorney Marios Karavannis, whose father, Nick, was among the researchers who died of a tumor.

Use of low levels of ionizing radiation and n-hexane, a common laboratory solvent, were the only things the



RICH HEIN, SUN-TIMES

Ten lawsuits have been filed against Amoco involving 20 former and current employees who worked at the research facility in Naperville.

afflicted researchers had in common, investigators said. But neither should have resulted in gliomas.

Researchers from Johns Hopkins University and the University of Alabama at Birmingham met with about 125 Amoco employees Thursday to outline results of their three-year study.

The university scientists also found that a seventh person thought to have a glioma actually had a form of skin cancer. Their research also ruled out any link between cancers and tumors other Amoco employees developed and work done at the research facility. That news angered some who say Amoco has abandoned them.

"You expect that there's a bond of trust built up," said Irwin Ginsburg, an Amoco employee for more than 20 years who worked in human resources. In the

1980s, he developed thyroid cancer. Ginsburg, who now lives near Chattanooga, Tenn., said he has not received responses to his requests for information about the cancers found at the center, he said.

Ten lawsuits have been filed against Amoco involving 20 former and current employees. More are likely, said Ginsburg's attorney, G. Grant Dixon III.

"What you're seeing is a calculated defense strategy," he said of the study released Thursday. "They've gone out and hired a defense expert."

Company officials have worked with current and former employees, providing cancer screenings and other help. The company is willing to talk about monetary help with those with gliomas, spokeswoman Vicki Kastory said.

Contributing: Associated Press

Victims' co-workers filled with questions, 'what ifs'

By MARK SKERTIC
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For six years, chemist David Sinclair worked on the third floor of Building 500 at what then was called the Amoco Research Center in Naperville.

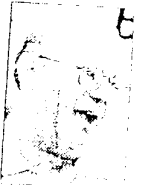
Six others who worked at the lab have contracted rare forms of brain cancer. So Sinclair and 125 other Amoco workers listened closely Thursday morning during a briefing by scientists who have spent three years searching for a possible link between the research center and the cancer cases.

"I wanted to hear what they said," Sinclair, an Amoco scientist for 24 years, said a few hours after the briefing at the BP Amoco Naperville Complex. "This is a sound scientific study. I don't think anything has been withheld."

Nearly 800 people work in the building but most of those who attend briefings on the cancer cases are longtime employees. They knew the men who developed gliomas, malignant tumors that affect the nerves of the brain. They wonder if they handled the same chemicals as the victims. And, researchers at heart, they are looking for answers.

When word of the first gliomas surfaced in 1989, Michelle Morie-Bebet was among those who thought they might just be seeing a tragic statistical anomaly.

"Up until the fourth one, I think everybody thought it was coincidence," said Morie-Bebet, who spent 11 years in Building 500's third floor. "I think there's a lot of information sharing. With me, they've been very open." Building 500's third floor is being remodeled into offices, and Sinclair said he wouldn't hesitate to move back there. "It's a different building today," he said. "The ventilation is different. The research going on now wasn't going on then."



David Sinclair
Calls study sound



Michelle
Morie-Bebet
11 years on 3rd