

Community

Man with cancer sues Amoco, wants info on Building 503

By Pucky Zimmerman

STAFF WRITER

The first legal action stemming from cancer problems at Amoco Oil Corporation's Naperville facility has been filed by a Tennessee man.

Irwin Samuel Ginsburg, 61, filed a petition in Cook County on Thursday, alleging that Amoco has documents relating to the illnesses and asking the court to help him obtain that information.

Ginsburg was an Amoco employee from 1970 through 1972 and worked in Building 503 as an employee resources manager, said his attorney G. Grant Dixon. Several years later he developed a rare form of thyroid cancer that has required surgery and medication.

In February it was learned that cancer had claimed the lives of two more former employees of Amoco's Warrenville Road research center, deepening a mystery that has so far killed four and afflicted at least two others. The two retirees who had worked in Building 503 during their Amoco careers died of gliomas - a rare form of brain tumor. In addition to the six known malignant tumors, doctors have found benign tumors

in 10 other employees.

Amoco has been attempting to rebuild the 28-year history of everyone who has worked at the building since it opened in 1970 - almost 8,000 current and former employees in all. Independent researchers from Johns Hopkins University and the University of Alabama-Birmingham are conducting the investigation, with results expected in the fall. Researchers are hoping to find a link or connection between the building, worker activities or chemicals and the incidences of inter-cranial cancer.

None of the cancer-stricken employees worked in the laboratory concurrently or on similar projects.

Tests on air, water, equipment and substances used in the laboratories have all turned up negative as possible causes. Amoco does not believe the building itself is responsible but, in 1996, it closed the third-floor wing that housed the lab.

According to Dixon, Ginsburg wants any documentation in Amoco's possession. "I can guarantee you that there is information out there. He's very concerned. He wants to see what's out there," the

attorney said.

Vicky Kastory, a spokesman for Amoco, said the company had not been asked for any information. "Our first concern is for the health of Mr. Ginsburg ... We know this is very traumatic for him."

The University of Alabama study is seeking to learn about any types of cancer contracted by Amoco employees. "So far, we are only aware of the gliomas," Kastory said. "We are trying to find the very information Mr. Ginsburg is looking for. It has always been our policy to be open and honest and to share any information. We want to make sure he has any information he needs to be comfortable."

The problems stemming from Building 503 were first discovered in 1989 when two men were diagnosed at nearly the same time with gliomas. Company records then turned up a third case, another former employee of the lab. In February 1996 and December 1997, two more retirees were diagnosed.

Amoco's research center employed almost 2,000 people in 1990, but since then downsizing has cut the work force in half. About 180 people still work in Building 503.