

Cancer saga at lab takes fresh twist

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Another mysterious turn has taken place in the baffling medical situation surrounding Building 503 of the Amoco Research Center in Naperville.

Irwin S. Ginsburg, 61, is a former employee resources manager at the laboratory who learned in 1982 that he had a rare cancer of his thyroid gland.

On Thursday, his attorneys filed a petition in Cook County Circuit Court to obtain documents relating to the high cancer rate among employees at the Naperville chemical research facility.

Last year, Ginsburg learned that at least 17 Amoco employees who had worked in the labs of the 503 complex were diagnosed with brain tumors.

Seven of them were diagnosed with gliomas, a deadly form of brain cancer. Four of the seven have died—two in February.

An additional 10 former or current building workers have benign brain tumors.

Ginsburg, now living in Tennessee, worked at Building 503 for two years after it opened in 1970.

The top floor of the three-story building has been closed and sealed. Amoco has experts from the University of Alabama at Birmingham and Johns Hopkins University working to identify every chemical, every project and every one of the 8,000 workers that ever came near that floor.

Company spokeswoman Vicki Kastory said there are no answers yet, no indications that any of the cases of tumors or cancers bears any relationship to any activity or chemical. It's not even really known what causes brain cancers or tumors in general, Kastory said.

She said the company would cooperate with Ginsburg's request for information.

Ginsburg's lawyer, G. Grant Dixon III of Corboy & Demetrio, said one of the things they were concerned about is that Amoco's focus on brain cancer might not be wide enough.

He said a lawsuit is certainly a possibility. "We will make that determination once we see what's out there," he said.

Ginsburg, who has undergone surgery, radiation therapy and is on life-long medication because of the illness, is otherwise healthy today, Dixon said.

Amoco has set up a hotline for any worker from the Naperville research center who has medical concerns or questions. They should call (888) 750-5777.