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HEADLINE: Ex-Amoco worker files suit, blaming company for cancer

BYLINE: Robert C. Herguth Daily Herald Staff Writer

BODY:

A 61-year-old former employee of the BP Amoco Research Center in Naperville filed a lawsuit Friday claiming the petroleum giant is responsible for cancer discovered in his liver last year.

Malignant and benign brain tumors have turned up in at least 20 people who used to work in the Naperville center, officials said. At least five have died.

"Our position is, basically, Amoco exhibited reckless disregard for the health of their workers and routinely - knowingly or should have known - were exposing them to dangerous chemicals," said Timothy S. Tomasik, the attorney for George A. Varney.

Varney, who now lives in Florida and is semi-retired, worked at the Amoco facility from 1973 through 1986 as an operational engineer who helped maintain Building 503's heating, ventilation, air conditioning and exhaust systems, Tomasik said.

The building was the site of various research projects and experiments involving chemicals, the lawsuit claims. And Amoco "intentionally exposed" Varney to gases, fumes and vapors and never told him about the "highly toxic and injurious" nature of them, the suit alleges.

It wasn't until September 1998 that Varney learned he had cancer - he has a malignant tumor in his liver and will die if a donor does not become available, his attorney said.

"Our medical experts have said this type of cancer is consistent with being exposed to toxic chemicals," Tomasik said.

Due to a court ruling earlier this week, the suit will be consolidated with all others filed by attorneys who claim their clients died or became ill because of working at the Amoco facility.

Corboy & Demetrio attorney G. Grant Dixon III, who seeks to be the lead attorney for all cases, said his firm plans to file another suit shortly.

BP Amoco officials could not be reached for comment.

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