

ST. LOUIS

Superfund task force may ask state AG for help

By **Linda Gittleman**

For the Morning Sun

The Pine River Superfund Task Force is fed up with Michigan's Department of Health and Human Services and the Michigan Public Health Institute.

In a blistering letter to Nick Lyon, director of the Department of Health and Human Services, the citizens action group outlined the years of problems, lack of help and even

roadblocks the group has faced when it comes to PBB and the health impact on its residents.

If no action is forthcoming, the task force is prepared to take the problem to the state's attorney general.

When the fire retardant PBB was accidentally introduced into the food chain in the 1970s, the state began a study to evaluate the health of Michigan residents and workers at the St. Louis Velsicol plant.

That study fizzled out begin-

ning in the early 1990s, said Dr. Ed Lorenz, vice chair of the task force.

"It was irresponsible," he said. "They dropped workers because they had too many contaminants in their bodies."

This was done despite the fact that "peer reviewed research continued to reveal a variety of statistically significant human health problems associated with exposure to PBB," the letter said.

The ball that was dropped

by the state was picked up by Emory University's Rollins School of Public Health in 2013.

Emory has continually, with the help of the task force, tried to get the names of the approximately 4,000 people who were in the original group called the PBB Cohort.

These people have to give their permission to release the files to the university, Lorenz explained, adding that permis-



COURTESY PHOTO

The Pine River as seen in St. Louis.

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sion is not needed from the families of those who have died.

The state however, is unable to supply the names and addresses, Lorenz said.

It's clear that, "the records the institute holds in its data base are flawed and in some cases lost in the files," the letter stated.

A total of about 500 residents and former St. Louis residents participated in health screenings conducted by Emory a few years ago.

One man, who worked at the chemical plant, had his original paperwork from the 1970s with him when he went to the screening

but the state claimed they had no record of him, Lorenz said.

"After the 1970s PBB disaster, the people of St. Louis became guinea pigs for both chemical exposure and also public health agency indifference," the letter stated.

"Unwittingly, we were pioneers in demonstrating policy failures that most recently, the residents of Flint are coping with," the letter continued.

The PBB study records were turned over to the Michigan Public Health Institute (MPHI) an organization created to study public health issues. Lyon also serves as chairman of that board.

What is particularly troubling to task force members is the "constant

citing of privacy laws" by the MPHI.

"Do you think the hundreds of questions we receive from PBB-exposed people are about privacy concerns?" the letter said.

"No, they are worried and (have) heartfelt questions about the health outcomes experienced by themselves and their children and grandchildren."

Until health departments throughout the state can provide answers, updated research results and educational materials to the people exposed, the state is not meeting its own requirements, Lorenz said.

St. Louis is the epicenter of the PBB disaster and the task force is aware of the global implications of exposed populations, since

similar fire retardant products continue to be made, he said.

The St. Louis area and the PBB Cohort are ideal for study.

Three generations are needed for study - exposure can and does impact subsequent generations - the state has the beginnings of a 40 year inter-generational study in its hands, Lorenz said.

"If you cannot resolve this issue with a phone call or two, let us know, as we are prepared to take our concerns to the state attorney general," the letter concluded.

Copies were sent to Gov. Snyder and Attorney General Bill Schuette as well as State Senator Judy Emons and State Representative James Lower.