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McHenry woman with Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma files suit over chemical pollution

October 1, 2019

UNION, IL – A woman who developed Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma after living near metal processing plants in the Village of Union, Illinois in McHenry County filed a lawsuit on Tuesday seeking damages against the plant owners for knowingly polluting the surrounding communities with cancer-causing chemicals for decades.

The victim, Dana Harper, a 44-year old woman, lived with wire and alloy manufacturing plants across the street for almost three decades. During that time, a plant managed by Central Wire, Inc./Techalloy Company Inc, and another factory managed by Phibro-Tech and Southern California Chemical Company, was emitting, and improperly disposing of, a blend of volatile organic compounds (VOCs) including, but not limited to, the established carcinogens trichloroethylene (TCE), tetrachloroethylene (PCE) and ammonia into the surrounding air, soil and water. These plants were also located mere feet from Evergreen Academy, a magnet school for 6th-12th grade students. TCE is used for a number of industrial tasks, such as degreasing metal parts, but has been shown to have such dangerous effects that the Environmental Protection Agency recently proposed a ban on the use of the chemical as a degreaser, as well as in industrial drycleaning facilities.

"The toxic nature of these chemicals is no secret to anyone. To release them into the world is to cause someone's death sentence," said Antonio Romanucci of Romanucci & Blandin, LLC, one of the attorneys representing Ms. Harper. "These companies need to be held responsible for their actions."

The four defendants are well aware of the consequences that years of improper disposal of TCE and other VOCs has had on the communities surrounding their facilities. As the lawsuit details, multiple tests throughout the 1990s found unsafe levels of contaminants in groundwater beneath the plant, in soil, and in groundwater wells of nearby residential homes. In addition, TCE was federally recognized as an air pollutant as early as 1970, and added to the Environmental Protection Agency's hazardous substance list in 1976.

"Central Wire put me into the direct zone of danger through improper handling of ultrahazardous material. The company should have exercised reasonable care to protect my health and the health of my community," said Ms. Harper. "They can never give me back my health, but these dangerous actors must clean up their mess and to operate with human compassion and respect going forward."

Several companies are named as defendants in the lawsuit including Phibro-Tech, Southern

California Chemical Company, Inc, Central Wire, Inc., and Techalloy Company, Inc., who collectively ran two factories which did metal production work at 17415 Jefferson Street and 6509 Olson Road in Union, both down the street from the residence where Ms. Harper lived for 26 years.

"The defendants in this case did nothing to prevent the spread of or treat the toxic TCE and PCE waste they emitted, and Ms. Harper has suffered serious harm because of continued exposure to these chemicals," said Michael Grieco, the other attorney representing Ms. Harper for Romanucci & Blandin, LLC.

All of the companies named as defendants have faced scrutiny for negligent, reckless, and repeated violations of Illinois and United States Environmental Protection Agency regulations, as well as state and federal statutes. All defendants have faced investigation from the EPA for their conduct, including Southern California Chemical Company, Inc. who had a facility shut down by the EPA. Facilities operated by Techalloy and Central Wire, Inc. have also been placed under a consent decree due to reckless management of toxic chemicals.

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