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TODAY'S WEATHER



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Spelter area residents beginning 30 years of medical monitoring as part of settlement

by Leslie Moses
STAFF WRITER

CLARKSBURG — Spelter resident Lenora Perrine, 79, can see the site of the old zinc smelting plant from her kitchen window. She's lived in "Zone 1" — the area closest to the former plant — since she was age 10.

Perrine has seen quite a progression.

First, there was the "filthy"

zinc plant with fire coming out. Then there was "this big hill of black stuff" outside, she said, recalling the view about 10 years ago. Now, there is just a field.

The latest development is off-site in area doctors' offices, where Perrine and other locals are tested for health problems caused by exposure to the plant's chemicals.

About 6,000 people registered

for medical monitoring following a lawsuit against DuPont over the Spelter plant, according to Ed Gentle, a settlement administrator representing the court.

Some residents checked the "yes" box, indicating they want medical monitoring; others checked the "no" box and got cash instead, according to Gentle.

Gentle is mum on many of

the details of the settlement.

He emphasizes his neutrality in the case and, instead, refers to a website full of documents that, however detailed, aren't scannable through the typical word-search method.

Residents who opted for medical monitoring are on the cusp of a 30-year checkup period.

Here's a little of what's involved.

A fund is set up for medical monitoring; guidelines are set; and health-care providers are contracted for the testing, according to United Hospital Center's Bruce Carter.

Clinics in the area will do some of the testing; there are other clinics for people who live out of state, Gentle said.

A UHC primary care doctor in Shinnston is one provider. The doctor attended meetings

on how to perform the screenings and what issues to look for, according to Carter.

MedExpress Urgent Care is another provider.

The monitoring looks for conditions that can arise from exposure to three chemicals — cadmium, arsenic and lead, said Dr. Kelly Nelson, medical director of MedExpress.

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Among the concerns are kidney problems and lung, skin and colon cancer, according to Nelson.

The time to qualify for the medical monitoring program was March-August 2011, Gentle said.

The 30-year testing period — for current and past residents of the Spelter area — began in November, according to Gentle.

The area is mapped in three zones under the settlement.

The first zone, where Perrine lives, includes those who live closest to the former plant; it includes those who lived there one year during the span from 1966 to the end of August 2011.

Zone 2 is for those farther away who lived there three years.

Zone 3 is for those in the area still farther from the former zinc plant who lived there five years, according to Gentle.

Testing varies by age, and includes blood, urine and stool

tests, according to Gentle and Nelson.

CT scans are also including in the testing, but doctors need a specific finding first, according to Gentle.

UHC is one provider of diagnostic testing like CT scans, but "we just do the testing," Carter said. UHC doesn't make final decisions on whether findings are related to the zinc plant, according to Carter.

After running tests, providers review results, patient history and symptoms, according to Nelson. A physical is also performed, and providers determine if further

testing is needed, he said.

About 100 people have been to MedExpress for medical monitoring since testing began there in January, according to Nelson.

So far, Nelson can't say they've found anything definite linked to the zinc plant.

But it's a long testing period, and Nelson said, "It really hasn't surprised us that we really haven't uncovered anything yet."

There have been probably fewer than 10 people at UHC for diagnostic testing, according to Carter, who estimates the hospital began the tests for

the Spelter settlement in January.

Perrine was one of the first to be tested, she said. She saw a Shinnston doctor and is now waiting on an appointment with a kidney doctor in Buckhannon.

Perrine's doctor didn't think there was any danger and said it was up to her if she wanted further tests.

She did. Perrine remembers when youth played on the site, riding bikes by the big hill of black factory discharge.

"I want it checked out to make sure," she said.