To: Mahler, Tom[mahler.tom@epa.gov]
From: Kappelman, David
Sent: Thur 11/17/2016 12:56:05 PM
Subject: FW: ST. LOUIS 'radioactive waste' issue!

Tom,

I will have time to talk today if you want to. I will be off tomorrow and next Monday though.

Missouri home contaminated by wartime radioactive waste, lawsuit says

Couple warns of continuing danger from second world war-era nuclear weapons program around St Louis, where uranium was processed

Robbin and Mike Dailey of Missouri say their home contains dangerous levels of radioactive waste. Photograph: David Woodfall/Getty Images

Ryan Schuessler in St Louis, Missouri

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A Missouri couple says their home is contaminated with dangerously high levels of radioactive waste left over from the US government's second world war-era atomic weapons program.

In a lawsuit filed in the St Louis County circuit court on Tuesday, Robbin and Mike Dailey of Bridgeton say dust samples collected from their kitchen and basement were found to contain the radioactive element thorium-230 at levels about 200 times higher than normal "background" levels. In a move they hope shines a light on the continuing impact of the country's early nuclear weapons program on their midwestern city, the Daileys named nine companies in their lawsuit that they say are responsible for decades of negligence that led to the contamination of their property.

Home to the scientists who built the nuclear bomb, the company town of Los Alamos, New Mexico is today one of the richest in the country – even as toxic waste threatens its residents and neighbouring Española struggles with poverty

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“The stress my husband and I have been under is equally toxic,” Robbin Dailey said of the test results from her home Tuesday afternoon. “It was sad. Shocking. I had a good cry. After that I was pissed as hell and ready to fight.”

The Daileys’ attorneys said the test result documents would not be immediately available, and that the analysis was carried out by a third-party researcher in conjunction with a private laboratory in Massachusetts.

The city of St Louis played a lesser known role in the US government’s push to develop the first atomic weapons in the 1940s – a program called the Manhattan Project that continues to plague thousands of residents here. For years, the city hosted a plant where raw uranium ore from the Congo went through the initial stages of purification. A plot of land near St Louis’s airport became a dumping ground for the radioactive waste from that process, and eventually a haphazard storage site for other radioactive waste – including 60 tons of radioactive sands captured from Nazi Germany near the end of the war.

Following the end of the second world war, the private and public entities responsible for the waste dissolved, merged and passed off culpability for St Louis’s radioactive legacy. The waste was parsed, moved and dumped around the region at a still unknown scale.

One prominent case is that of Coldwater Creek, a tributary of the Missouri River that flows through St Louis’s northern suburbs and is known to have been contaminated by radioactive nuclear weapons waste. Last year, the US army corps of engineers – which has assumed responsibility for cleaning up most of the area’s contaminated sites – confirmed it had found thorium-230 in residential and public property along the creek.

A study this year found dust and dirt samples collected around north St Louis County contained levels of a radioactive lead higher than the Department of Energy’s threshold for cleanup.

Long-term exposure to low levels of radiation is linked to higher rates of cancer, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). A nonscientific survey of current and former residents of the area found that nearly a third of 3,300 respondents reported cancer, including 43 cases of appendix cancer – a disease so rare that fewer than 1,000 cases are expected in the United States each year. A 2014 study by Missouri’s department of health and senior services found elevated rates of cancer and autoimmune diseases in zip codes near known contaminated sites.

“There’s six people in my house, and all six of us have issues,” said Kirbi Pemberton, who has lived in north St Louis County her whole life. In 2004, Pemberton’s 11-year-old daughter died of a rare form of brain cancer. Missouri’s 2014 study on cancer rates in the area found seven cases of childhood brain cancer in Pemberton’s zip code when, statistically, there should have only been two or three. “Honestly, people literally die, and we’re still sitting here doing nothing.”

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The Daileys allege that the dust found in their home can be traced to the West Lake landfill, a dump adjacent to their property, where an unknown amount of Manhattan Project waste was illegally dumped by a private company in the 1970s. The waste is still there.

The landfill is now owned by the Arizona-based waste management giant Republic Services, which the Daileys name in their suit.

"We have not seen the suit, or any scientific data to support its foundation," a Republic Services spokesperson, Russ Knocke, said in an emailed statement. "For years, federal regulators, state officials, and third-party experts have been clear that the Landfill is safe. There has been no evidence that supports a claim for off-site contamination. The landfill remains in a managed state."

On the contrary, studies commissioned by Missouri's attorney general last year found that trees and vegetation on properties adjacent to the landfill had absorbed radioactive materials, and that chemicals found in area groundwater could be traced back to the complex. In May, the EPA – which has jurisdiction over the site – found that radioactive particles had been detected in rainwater runoff near the landfill.

"The Environmental Protection Agency has not received any new data regarding any migration off-site of radiologically impacted material from the West Lake Landfill," an EPA spokesperson told St Louis Public Radio in response to the Daileys' suit. "As we have previously stated, if individuals have new, scientifically valid data that we could evaluate, they should share that with EPA. The protection of human health and the environment remains EPA's highest priority at the West Lake site and all current, scientifically valid, data available to EPA demonstrate no off-site health risks to residents or employees in the local area."

"I'm not surprised" by the Daileys' test results, said Dawn Chapman of Just Moms STL, an organization that is pushing for cleanup of the West Lake landfill and for buyouts for nearby residents. "These people are going to be cooking Thanksgiving in their kitchen next week, and what are they supposed to do?"

She added: "Our federal government has abandoned us. They've left us to fight a billion-dollar corporation on our own."

"We don't have 30 more years of putting into our future," Robbin Dailey, 61, said. She and her husband moved into their home in 1999. "It's horrible that everything here is wrapped up in this, and is now worthless. I didn't willfully come into this, but it's been dumped on me, and I'm not going to burry my head in the sand and pretend everything is OK."