

Call for landfill cancer inquiry

By ANNE BARBELIUK

THE site of an old Hobart landfill should be tested for groundwater contamination after a number of cancers have been discovered in the area over 30 years, the State Opposition says.

Environment spokesman Jeremy Rockliff said landfill sites were a "potential time-bomb" that needed urgent attention.

He called on the State Government to undertake detailed monitoring of all 176 Tasmanian landfill sites.

Mr Rockliff said he was alarmed by the tragic number of people who had contracted cancer and other serious illness after living near the old Howrah landfill site, now called Wentworth Park.

But he said the Government was not taking the issue seriously.

The Opposition first pushed for testing of the old tip last June and renewed its call this month after the release of the State of the Environment Report.

“People have had a lot of trauma and the Government has just turned a blind eye to it,”

This said up to 100 of Tasmania's 176 landfill sites may have contaminated groundwater.

The call follows concerns raised with the Government by Howrah resident Poppy Lopatniuk.

Mrs Lopatniuk, who lived near the tip when it was in use during the 1960s, has compiled a list of 21 people whom she fears may be victims of contamination from living close to the landfill site.

All 21 on the list have died from cancer or other serious illnesses.

One of the latest victims is Mrs Lopatniuk's son, Peter Lopatniuk, who died from leukemia last year at the age of 35.

Mr Lopatniuk, who grew

Children seemed to get rheumatoid arthritis and diabetes.

Her two daughters have auto-immune diseases.

Mrs Lopatniuk is concerned her son's death, and the deaths of many others who have lived near the site, are the result of groundwater contamination.

She has been calling for groundwater contamination testing of the area for the past five years.

“People have had a lot of trauma and the Government has just turned a blind eye to it,” Mrs Lopatniuk said.

She said authorities seemed to rely on confidential cancer registry figures, which she believed did not break down into smaller areas.

The former Howrah tip, which opened in 1962 and closed in 1969, was an uncontrolled site -- mainly used for the dumping of household rubbish.

“There was a critical period when people seemed to get ill, people who moved there when the tip was closing and when the families arrived in

the area,” she said.

She believes about 1965 to 1975 was the critical period.

Mr Rockliff said: “It is unbelievable and unconscionable that in spite of the extraordinary number of people who have died or contracted serious illnesses, and who lived within a short radius of the old Howrah landfill site, that the State Government is still resisting calls for the area to be tested for contaminants.”

Public health director Roscoe Taylor said he had looked into Mrs Lopatniuk's concerns regarding Wentworth Park but there appeared to be no cancer cluster in the area.

“The issue here is that cancer is unfortunately all too common, with up to one in



CAMPAIGN: Poppy Lopatniuk yesterday remembers her son Peter, who died of leukemia which she fears he may have contracted from a landfill site. Picture: SAM ROSEWARNE

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All 21 on the list have died from cancer or other serious illnesses.

One of the latest victims is Mrs Lopatniuk's son, Peter Lopatniuk, who died from leukemia last year at the age of 35.

Mr Lopatniuk, who grew up in Bambill St, Howrah, was first diagnosed with leukemia at nine years of age and went into remission about 14. He was again diagnosed with leukemia and a brain tumour at 33.

“My son was the first to get sick... then I watched others around us get sick,” Mrs Lopatniuk said.

“None of them responded to treatment. They all seemed to die very quickly.”

“I suspected something was wrong because these were all healthy-living people.”

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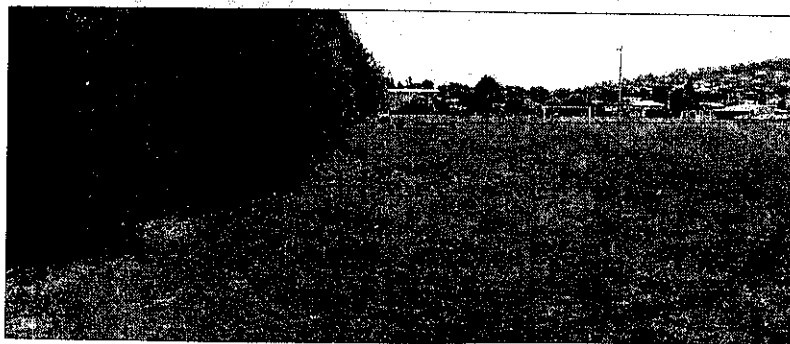
“The issue here is that cancer is unfortunately all too common, with up to one in three people contracting a form of cancer in their lifespan and one in four people dying from it,” he said.

Dr Taylor said he had found no evidence to suggest there was a pattern of specific cancer types or other diseases being contracted around the site.

“There is no plausible exposure pathway for any contaminants, if they did exist, to cause health affects in people in the neighbourhood,” he said.



CAMPAIGN: Poppy Lopatniuk yesterday remembers her son Peter, who died of leukemia which she fears he may have contracted from a landfill site. Picture: SAM ROSEWARNE



CONCERN: The site of the old Howrah rubbish tip near which Mrs Lopatniuk once lived.

Hundreds of sites may be contaminated

TASMANIA'S State of the Environment Report recommends that environmental and health risks from contaminated land are identified.

It said contamination could result from refuse disposal, timber preservation plants, service stations, chemical manufacturing industries and gas works, among others.

“The number of suspected but not confirmed contaminated sites in Tasmania is unknown but is likely to be in the order of many hundreds,” said the report, which was released last month.

“The potential damages to an ecosystem or to a community's health can be significant and the costs of cleaning up the site can be high.”

Liberal Party environment spokesman Jeremy Rockliff said a Department of Mineral Resources study in 2002 examined 10 tip sites and found potentially dangerous groundwater contamination in six.

“This should have prompted the State Government to undertake investigations

into all 176 landfill sites in the state,” he said.

Greens environment spokesman Nick McKim said the issue warranted full investigation.

“The Government knows there's a broad issue of concern in terms of landfill contamination,” he said.

“Couple that with a high level of concern, it

would demand the Government investigate further.”

According to the Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, samples from groundwater monitoring would only indicate the current status of Wentworth Park's groundwater quality and not whether it was contaminated