Call for landfill cancer inquiry

By ANNE BARSELIUK

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," Mrs Lopatiuk said.

Children seemed to get childhood arthritis and diabetes.

Her two daughters have autoimmune diseases.

Mrs Lopatiuk 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 in the area for the last five years.

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

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

"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"
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 illnesses after living near the old Howrah landfill site, now called Westmeath Park.

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

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"People have had a lot of trauma and the Government has just turned a blind eye to it," 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 releasing waste to be tested for contaminants."

Public health director Rosemary Taylor said he had looked into Mrs Lepatniak's concerns regarding Westmeath 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 three people contracting it and costs of dealing with it on the increase," she said.

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

"There is no plausible exposure pathway for any contaminants, if they did exist, to cancer risks in people in the neighbour hood," he said.

Hundreds of sites may be contaminated

TASMANIA: State of the Environment report says government should undertake detailed monitoring of all 176 landfill sites that may be contaminated with hazardous materials.

The number of suspected or confirmed contaminated sites in Tasmania is unknown, but likely to be in the order of many hundreds, reported the report, which was released last month.

"The potential damages to an ecosystem or to a community's health can be significant and the cost in cleaning up the sites can be high," he said.

Liberal Party environment spokesman Nick McKim said the issue warranted full investigation.

"The Government knows there is a broad issue of concern in terms of landfill contamination," he said.

"Couple that with a high level of public concern and the fact that many of these sites are located in residential areas or near water sources, and one can see why the Government would demand the Government investigate further," he said.

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