



THE MEMPHIS DEPOT TENNESSEE

ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD COVER SHEET

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No elevated cancer rate found at defense depot

By Tom Charlier
The Commercial Appeal

A government health study has found no evidence of elevated cancer rates in neighborhoods surrounding the old Defense Depot Memphis, where buried chemical warfare materials and hazardous wastes have spawned fears among residents.

A study of 23 cancer types showed the incidence rates for residents living in six census tracts near the South Memphis facility generally were at or below the rates experienced throughout Shelby County and Tennessee.

The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry conducted the assessment. Its formal report, published this month, is being issued for public comment.

The 642-acre depot, which operated from 1942 until 1997, contains a disposal area where World War II German mustard gas bombs, chemical wastes and other items were buried, beginning in the 1940s. Crews have begun excavation into the disposal area to re-

move chemical warfare materials.

In a separate effort, officials have been extracting and treating ground water contaminated with chemical solvents.

The ATSDR study was limited to the period between 1990 and 1996. No data on cancer incidence were available for previous years. The agency found that overall, cancer rates in the area were at or below expected rates.

Males experienced lower-than-usual rates of esophageal and lung cancer. Females had marginally higher rates of endometrial cancer, but their rates for lung, breast, pancreatic and bladder cancers were lower than expected.

Despite the contamination problems, the agency review found it unlikely that the depot could be the source of any cancers experienced by nearby residents.

The public comment period on the cancer assessment extends through June 26.

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