

S.I. Dump Survey Finds No Serious Health Peril

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

A Health Department survey of people living next to a Staten Island landfill where toxic wastes were illegally dumped has found a significantly greater degree of minor respiratory complaints but not serious illness, a new city report said yesterday.

The report also reaffirmed earlier findings of no toxic contamination or health hazard at the Staten Island site, known as Brookfield, and four other city landfills where the toxic wastes had been dumped in the 1970's.

The conclusions, set forth in an inter-agency report compiled by the city's Departments of Environmental Protection, Sanitation and Health, drew immediate objections from community leaders and others.

"The fact that this zone showed more problems than elsewhere, it should have been worded more strongly," said Rose Pisciotto, who lives nearby and heads a group called Irate, for Islanders Against a Toxic Environment.

"There definitely is a problem here, but they're afraid of causing a panic," she said. She also charged that the report had deliberately been released on the eve of the Thanksgiving holiday to lessen its effect.

Senator Is Not Convinced

State Senator Ralph J. Marino, chairman of the Select Committee on Crime that has been investigating patterns of toxic waste dumping crimes, also issued a statement urging suspension of any judgment concerning danger to the public "until more evidence is in than the amount supporting this report."

The health survey questioned residents in 456 households in a census tract

abutting the Brookfield landfill and in 99 households in a control area some distance away. Brookfield, which was closed in 1980, is part of the 3,000-acre Fresh Kills landfill that receives about half of the city's daily output of 20,000 tons of solid waste.

In the six months prior to the survey, 45 percent of the group adjacent to the landfill reported visiting a doctor or health care professional, compared with 25 percent in the control group, the report said.

The visits were said to be for "chest or breathing problems, ear, nose or throat problems, stomach complaints, nerve problems including headache, and emotional problems."

The nearby residents also reported more complaints for which they did not seek care, more allergies and more days absent from regular activities — 2.3 days, against 1.2 days for the control group.

However, the report said, both study groups reported similar medical visits for kidney, muscle, heart, blood, gynecological and skin complaints.

The report reaffirmed a consultant's findings released last summer that the landfills do not pose any health threat.

However, a draft report by the State Department of Environmental Protection, never made public, challenged some of the conclusions and methodology.

The city report was a response to concern over accounts of extensive chemical dumping at the landfills by companies of Russell W. Mahler, a former oil company president and a convicted toxic-waste dumper.