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 Collection Agencies
 Past Due Utility Bills
 Personal Loans
 Medical Bills
 Other

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February 06, 2003

Fallon tungsten plant operated without pollution controls

ASSOCIATED PRESS

RENO, Nev. (AP) - A tungsten plant north of Fallon operated for more than two decades without pollution controls, the Reno Gazette-Journal reported Thursday.

The newspaper said state officials never mentioned operations at the Kennametal plant, even after scientists began looking at tungsten as a possible link to Fallon's childhood leukemia cluster.

The company denied any ties to the cancer cluster that has sickened 16 children since 1997. Three have died.

Kennametal installed emission controls at the kiln 10 miles north of the rural town in 1994.

Tests have shown elevated levels of tungsten in Fallon-area residents and drinking water supplies, and at least one scientist has said his research shows the heavy metal appears to alter cancer cells.

The newspaper report comes as the National Centers for Disease Control and Prevention was scheduled to release its latest findings into the cancer cluster at a town hall meeting in Fallon.

State regulators last week said they didn't elaborate on the firm's environmental history because they didn't think it was relevant and they didn't want to mention specific companies that haven't been accused of anything.



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"This agency did not hide anything about Kennametal," said Jolaine A. Johnson, deputy administrator at the state Division of Environmental Protection. "It would not have been responsible of us to point a finger at them or any other individual industry."

But former Fallon Assemblywoman Marcia de Braga said Kennametal's history should have been revealed.

"We asked about pollution; we got general answers. I would have liked to have heard about the specifics of Kennametal's water and air quality history, but we just weren't told."

Kennametal officials said this week the firm isn't linked to any public health problems and operates in a manner that ensures the safety of both employees and residents.

"Kennametal remains committed to finding the cause of these unfortunate illnesses, and we will continue to cooperate with any and all agencies and organizations that share our goal," company spokesman Gary Peterson told the newspaper.

"We've been part of Fallon for five decades, and our employees and their families live in this community," Peterson said. "We are concerned about their health and safety."

State officials said the firm's history wasn't considered relevant in the cancer probe because open burning happened before 1994, three years before the first recognized case in the leukemia cluster was diagnosed.

They said Kennametal has been in compliance with regulations since 1994.

Johnson said officials acted expeditiously and in good faith both in regulating Kennametal and in providing information for the leukemia probe.

"No one has identified a path of exposure to tungsten that has anything to do with Kennametal," she said. But she said industrial tungsten must be looked at as a possible source of the high levels of the metal in Fallon.

"Of course it has to be considered," Johnson said.
"It's a major facility using tungsten. It stands to
reason it should be examined."

Information from: Reno Gazette-Journal

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