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Group: Plant pollution may have sickened boy

By JENNY BONE MILLER  
Norwich Bulletin

EAST LYME -- A Canterbury first-grader will have painful surgery on his face for the fourth time because of a tumor his mother said was preventable. Tonia Hartley, 24, who lived on State Street in Niantic, swam every day in the Niantic Bay during the summer of 1997, when she was pregnant with Zachary, who is 7 now.

She and Zachary's father, Michael Hartley, 26, said Thursday at a press conference organized by the Connecticut Coalition Against Millstone, that cesium-137 and other chemicals emitted into the water from the nearby Millstone Nuclear Plant caused a rare benign tumor the size of an orange in Zachary's mouth. That tumor contained another, cancerous tumor.

When Zachary was 14 months old, doctors removed part of his jaw and the fetal rhabdomyoma, which had a fetal rhabdomyosarcoma inside it, in a surgery that took 23 hours. Before that he had three biopsies.

Zachary, an active boy who takes karate lessons and likes monster trucks, will have facial reconstructive surgery this summer. Doctors will break his leg to take some bone to build a new jaw for him. Despite the pain, his mother said, he is anxious to have the surgery to end the constant teasing he has endured from his peers. When asked if he was afraid of the surgery Thursday, he quickly said no.

"It hurts me more than anything to know that if I hadn't lived there, if I didn't swim there, he would be OK," Tonia Hartley said in a taped message that was played at the news conference. She was in Boston arranging for Zachary's next surgery and left the tape to be played on her behalf.

In 1997, a fish contaminated with cesium-137 was found in the bay. The family suspected the chemicals in the water might have caused Zachary's problems when they were diagnosed, but their fears were dismissed as paranoia, Michael Hartley said.

Shortly after Zachary's birth, they moved to Canterbury, where Tonia had a second, healthy son, who is 3 years old.

In January, the family saw that the Northeast Nuclear Energy Co., which owned Millstone in the 1990s, had admitted falsifying environmental records and dumping hundreds of gallons of hydrazine, a toxic chemical used to reduce the corrosion of pipes, into Long Island Sound.

In February, they contacted the coalition and said the Hartleys wanted to tell the public their story.

"Millstone has been dumping chemicals into the water for years, and they say it's no big deal," Michael Hartley said. He and Zachary visited the Hole-in-the-Wall beach where Tonia swam so many years ago for the news conference. Red and white striped Millstone towers were visible on the horizon as Zachary walked along the shore.

"I'm here to say it's not safe," Michael Hartley said.

Dr. Helen Caldicott, well-known former Harvard instructor in pediatrics and anti-nuclear activist, supported the family's claims at the news conference.

She said although there is no way to know with 100 percent certainty what causes any cancer, more than 17 rhabdomyomas were diagnosed in the immediate area around the nuclear power plant in Brookhaven, N.Y.

"As a good physician, you'd have to suspect," she said. "Cesium 137 causes tumors like this boy has."

The family has not filed papers for a lawsuit. Michael Hartley said they want the power plant closed, but at the very least the bay should be closed to swimming. He said they would consider filing a lawsuit in the future if that's what it takes to close the plant, but they have not hired a lawyer yet.

"I would like the state to do some real studies on this. What they have now are based on the state tumor registry, and those can't be accurate because Zachary's tumor wasn't registered," he said. "It wasn't 100 percent cancer, even though there were cancer cells inside the tumor, so he wasn't counted."

Environmental factors have not been identified as causes of fetal rhabdomyoma, Richard V. Worrell, vice chairman emeritus of the department of orthopedics, University of New Mexico School of Medicine, wrote in an article at [\\_www.emedicine.com\\_](http://www.emedicine.com) (<http://www.emedicine.com>) .

"We have a lot of empathy for the family, but we absolutely disagree with the correlation to Millstone Power Plant," Pete Hyde, spokesman for Millstone, said. "We emit only a fraction of the radiation we are allowed by federal guidelines. They make the claim that one fish was found with cesium-137. Did they say how much? They have no scientific background and they make the case that because one child had a tumor it must be Millstone's fault."

He said Millstone employees raise their families near the plant and swim in the water. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission gave Millstone a glowing report this month, he said.

In the 1990s, the plant was owned by Northeast Utilities, and there were some problems with environmental reports then. But in 2001, it was bought by Dominion and has a clean record.

Hyde acknowledged the plant emits trace amounts of chemicals.

"By trace amounts, we're talking parts per million or parts per billion, with a B," Hyde said. "The coalition has one agenda, and that's to shut down Millstone Power Plant. We just don't agree with their conclusions."

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