



## Youth cancer rates 'obscene,' MD says

### Film takes aim at health impact of trucks, pollution

**ALARMING:** Dr. Dolores Sicheri, an oncologist at the Windsor Regional Cancer Centre, says cancer is “an environmental disease,” pointing to the volumes of heavy metals and pollutants in our air and water.

**Dave Battagello, Windsor Star**

Published: Thursday, May 24, 2007

### Article tools

Babies born in Windsor already have up to 287 industrial chemicals in their blood, a new documentary film reveals. Toxic Trespass, sponsored in part by the National Film Board of Canada, debuted Wednesday in Vancouver at a documentary film festival. It will be screened again Saturday during a three-day cancer conference in Ottawa.

The film takes aim at the health impact caused by thousands of diesel trucks rolling daily through Windsor's streets, plus the huge volumes of industrial pollution produced across the river. The writer and director of Toxic Trespass is Toronto filmmaker Barri Cohen, who appears in the film with her daughter to confront polluters, researchers and government officials who see no link between environmental problems and childhood disease.

The documentary was not intended to single out Windsor, but to show that this city is typical of what's happening around the world, said the film's executive producer Dorothy Goldin Rosenberg, a film consultant at the University of Toronto's Ontario Institute for Studies in Education. Sarnia is also featured in the film.

"It will be an eye-opener for many people as to the extent we are exposed to these chemicals," she said. "People are getting sick in numbers never seen before. Asthmas, cancers, birth defects, autism, and deformities -- the statistics are growing and we need to do something about this."

The making of the film led to revelations even for Rosenberg: "It was the extent to which these issues are prevalent. There is nothing like seeing it for yourself." She pointed to the health implications of this city's border truck problems. The resulting diesel emissions spill into nearby homes, she said. "For the people in Windsor, something needs to be done." For example, she said, freight trains should be used more frequently instead of trucks. "You can not allow for more of the same. Can you imagine what the traffic in Windsor is going to be in the future? People need to think 10 years ahead. There will be even more."

A Windsor mother whose nine-year-old daughter was diagnosed with a rare form of leukemia at the age of 16 months is among those featured in the film, she said. Others include local pediatrician Dr. Mark Awuku and one of the city's top local oncologists, Dr. Dolores Sicheri of the Windsor Regional Cancer Centre, who has spent years on the front line confronting the deadly disease. "Cancer is an environmental disease," said Sicheri, pointing to the volumes of heavy metals and PCBs in our air and water. "There is

an increase in cancers (in Windsor) -- and young cancers. There are so many young people with cancer here it's obscene."

Government has failed in its obligation to provide clean air and water, she said, adding numbers have also jumped locally for cardiovascular problems, diabetes, autism, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease and even mental health problems, which she said can also be linked to toxins in the body. She points to Zug Island, Detroit's incinerator and border trucks as easily identifiable contributors to our health woes.

"If they build another truck route on our streets it will be the death of this city," Sicheri said. "Diesel is killing us. The smog is so bad. You can't work outside or exercise. We are just the canary in the coal mine. Government has to put more here into prevention. It isn't enough just to treat patients after the illness. My fear is that this generation will not live longer than their parents. There will be shorter life spans. Our failure as a society will cost our children. Our children will have to clean up the mess that we left them."

Leo Petrilli, a local customs officer and environmental activist, is also in the film talking about the impact of trucks on Windsor -- the busiest border crossing in North America, handling \$160 billion per year in trade. We've never heated the planet faster than we have since NAFTA became reality," he said. "(The film) is important because it will help make everyone realize what's going on. Everything is shipped by truck. There are chemicals in diesel and there is not a proper structure (locally) to get freight across. You've got 16 traffic lights and trucks stopping and starting, belching diesel into this community."

## CAN'T BREATHE

"You have environment on one end of this and business on the other end. But if you can't breathe, you can't do anything. We deserve the best equipment and information. We deserve clean air and water like anybody else. That's not happening. I hope this gets politicians and business on the same side with environmentalists so we can sit down and figure out a way to get business done and get people healthy."

It is anticipated the documentary will soon be shown in Windsor, but no plans are finalized, Rosenberg said.