More local PBB tests still in question due to funding

by Greg Nelson
Herald Editor

Researchers from the Rollins School of Public Health in Atlanta, Ga. had hoped to return to Gratiot County last summer to conduct more PBB tests on local residents. However, due to the lack of funding, that did not occur.

The school did receive a grant from the National Institute of Environmental Health Science to continue the study, but it wasn’t as large as initially expected, Pine River Superfund Citizens Task Force Secretary Jane Keon said.

“That means they don’t have money to move forward with more PBB testing, especially remote testing of all the younger generations that have moved away,” she explained.

The task force, members of the Emory research team, Mid-Michigan District Health Department officials and the PBB Advisory Board have formed a PBB Leadership Team in hopes of raising additional funds.

“They will need to test 500 individuals to get 100 for their experimental work to see if a certain substance, when ingested, can speed elimination of PBB and DTT from the body,” Keon explained.

At a cost of $300 per person the group will need to raise $150,000.

“We don’t yet have the funding needed top\open up for blood draws,” Keon said.

The PBB Leadership Team’s goal is to raise money for people who have moved away from the area, but grew up or lived in Gratiot County and want to find out the level of PBB in their system, she added.

“(Initially) we had about 500 on the waiting list,” Keon said. “Now it’s over 1,000. Lots of people are going onto the PBB Registry website and filling out the forms necessary to get on the waiting list.”

However, there will be some people getting their blood drawn for an epigenetic study that has been funded by the NIEHS.

“The family configuration needed for this study is a grandfather who farmed or worked at the chemical plant and has high levels of PBB in his system; a grandmother who grew up in another state; and their children and grandchildren,” Keon explained. “Three generations are needed. Even though there won’t be open enrollment for blood draws, we do plan community meetings for this area and other places in the state. Those meetings will offer the latest research findings and the risks associated with their exposure to PBB.”

She expects a meeting to be held locally sometime in December. Emory University researchers have already been to Gratiot County twice to conduct free PBB screenings – in March 2013 in St. Louis and April 2014 at the Mid-Michigan District Health Department in Ithaca.

A total of about 500 people were tested during those visits. Most of those who took part signed up to become part of the university’s PBB registry.

In addition, 46 men and 38 women volunteered to be part of a reproductive study that’s also being conducted.
PBB exposure can affect the endocrine, immune and reproductive systems, and adversely impact liver function.
It can also cause skin rashes, hair loss, memory loss, and joint problems, among other health-related issues.
Initial results from the earlier blood samples taken showed that the median level of PBB in people's bloodstreams in this area was higher than that of the general population in other parts of the United States.
Analysis of the blood samples taken showed that former chemical plant workers “were by far the most highly contaminated,” Keon said.
Next were not the farm families as expected, but families of the chemical workers. Third were people who lived in St. Louis during the time of the chemical production, fourth were farm families and fifth were other state residents.”

Anyone interested in taking part in a future study can call Emory University at 888-892-0047 or send an email to pbbregistry@emory.edu.
Those who would like to get on a waiting list for a blood draw can go online to www.pbbregistry.emory.edu.