Area residents interested in updates on the PBB research in Michigan will be able to hear a presentation by Dr. Michele Marcus at 10 a.m. this Saturday, Dec. 9 at the Mid-Michigan District Health Department in Ithaca. Dr. Marcus, from the Rollins School of Public Health at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, has conducted research on the health outcomes of PBB exposure for 15 years. Her latest research includes people from the mid-Michigan area.

Participants will have an opportunity to become part of the PBB Registry by filling out forms at the event on Saturday. The original registry contains more than 6,000 people who agreed to take part in studies after the 1973-74 human exposure to the flame retardant PBB (polybrominated biphenyl) when the chemical compound entered the food chain by being mixed in animal feed in place of a mineral supplement. Michigan residents who ate meat, milk, eggs, cheese and butter during that time became contaminated with the chemical. In addition to the original 6,000 participants, many more have been added in recent years. When the PBB researchers offered community meetings in 2013 and 2014, over 500 people from the mid-Michigan area had their blood drawn and filled out forms to take part in studies of the impact on human health of PBB exposure. Since then, over 1,000 people have filled out the forms on-line and are on a waiting list to become full participants in the studies.

During December, the research team has several community events planned around the state. Their aim is to collect information to see if PBB exposure can be identified in children and grandchildren of workers from the St. Louis chemical plant, farmers and others who were exposed to PBB 40 years ago. Members of the Pine River Superfund Citizen Task Force and students from Alma College will be assisting at the community meeting in Ithaca. The Task Force is a grassroots organization sanctioned by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency as a community advisory group that monitors all cleanups at properties formerly owned by Velsicol Chemical Corporation, including the main plant site, a burn pit area, the Gratiot County Landfill, downstream in the Pine River, and a former radioactive dump.