

# The Camelford scandal (UK). Victims are starting to die of mystery diseases

## THE FLUORIDE ACTION NETWORK

FAN Bulletin #575: The Camelford scandal (UK).

April 16, 2006

Dear All,

You might wonder why this article (printed below) which appeared in today's *The Independent* (UK) on the Camelford scandal is relevant to those concerned about fluoride. There are several points of contact.

**1) Accidents happen.** This accident happened in Camelford when 20 tons of aluminum sulfate was dumped in the wrong tank at a water treatment plant and ended up in the drinking water. On several occasions accidents have also happened during fluoride additions in water plants, several resulting in sickness and in one case death. Trucking accidents have also occurred. For a listing of accidents see our web page <http://www.FluorideAction.net>. Also workers have been exposed directly to the highly toxic fluoridating chemicals and have become sick - there is another newspaper story about that today (see story in today's *Charleston Post and Courier*, below). So accidents happen, so what's the big deal? Well look at alternative ways of fighting tooth decay in children? Accidents happen, but few when one is brushing one's teeth or eating a good diet!

**2) Doug Cross.** Doug Cross, whose wife was killed by this exposure to aluminium sulfate, is also working very hard to fight fluoridation. Not only has he co-authored an article with Bob Carton on the unethical nature of the practice (published in the *International Journal of Occupational & Environmental Health*) but he has also recently found that the practice is illegal under European law (see Fan bulletins #390, 391 and 396).

**3) Absorbing chemicals from bath water.** I am often asked as to whether taking a bath in fluoridated water would increase exposure to the fluoride ion. Normally only fat soluble substances can cross the skin's fatty layers, but my gut feeling says that in the warm water the pores would open and thus allow water soluble substances (like fluoride) to cross the skin. But I would like to see this confirmed with an experiment in which blood samples are taken before and after a bath. Meanwhile, in this regrettable accident it would appear that Doug Cross's wife was exposed to aluminium through her bath water.

**4) Aluminium and Alzheimer's disease.** There has been a long ongoing dispute as to whether aluminium causes Alzheimer's disease or whether it simply accumulates with the disease. The dramatic symptoms experienced by Mrs. Cross and others, would certainly appear to indicate that aluminium damages the brain.

**5) Varner's study.** In 1998, in an article in the journal *Brain Research* by Varner and co-workers, it was shown that fluoride in water (both as sodium fluoride or aluminium fluoride) caused a greater uptake of aluminium into the brains of rats, as

well as the formation of beta amyloid deposits which are characteristic of Alzheimer's disease. This and other studies of fluoride's impacts on the brain were thoroughly discussed in chapter 7 of the NRC report (March 22, 2006). Could there have been fluoride in the chemicals in the Camelford accident?

**6) Government and industry deny problem.** Note that when citizens complained of their symptoms, the government denied any connection with the incident. The author writes:

"Hundreds of people complained of skin burns, rashes, ulcers, sore mouths and joints, memory loss and other symptoms, which they attributed to the aluminium and other metals that the chemical had dissolved from supply pipes.

Their complaints were dismissed after controversial inquiries held by the water authority and by the Department of Health."

Once again we see the tendency of government to deny any connection between health effects and accidents involving big economic interests or its own operations. In the case of fluoridation, governments continue to deny that any one is super-sensitive to fluoride and yet they have never conducted any scientific testing on this matter, despite formal suggestions that they do so (NHMRC, 1991) and despite the numerous case studies (Waldbott et al. 1978) as well as trials of people tested with sodium fluoride tablets versus placebo (Feltman and Kossel, 1968), which indicate that some people are indeed sensitive to low doses of fluoride.

All in all, the Camelford story is of great relevance to those concerned about fluoridation and fluoride toxicity.

Paul Connett

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<http://news.independent.co.uk/environment/article358010.ece>

Poisoned: The Camelford scandal

Victims of the Camelford scandal, Britain's worst water supply contamination incident, are starting to die of mystery diseases

By Geoffrey Lean, Environment Editor

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The victims of Britain's worst drinking water pollution disaster are beginning to die of mysterious diseases, an Independent on Sunday investigation has revealed.

The revelation, which follows the adjournment of an inquest on one of the victims after the coroner became concerned that the victim may have been poisoned, will refocus attention on the twin scandals of the original incident and the subsequent cover-up.

Carole Cross died after years of illness that followed taking a bath in water heavily polluted by aluminium sulphate, which was poured into the water supply of the small Cornish town of Camelford in 1988.

High levels of aluminium were found in parts of her brain, and a scientific paper due to be published soon is expected to confirm that her death appears to be linked to the incident.

Campaigners believe that more of the 20,000 people exposed to the polluted water have died as a result. Other victims with similar symptoms to Mrs Cross fear that they may follow her to the grave. One severely affected woman has already committed suicide.

The tragedy began when a driver poured 20 tons of the highly caustic chemical into the wrong tank at the Lowermoor water treatment works that serves the town. This caused "massive and almost instantaneous contamination of the water supply". Residents sounded the alarm after drinking or bathing in the foul-tasting water and after suffering weird effects that included skin peeling off their backs, hands and lips sticking together and fingernails and hair turning blue.

Official evidence obtained by the IoS shows that levels of aluminium reached 5,000 times the safety limit.

Yet the South West Water Authority, which then ran the works, was slow to investigate the cause of the problem and continued to insist that the water was safe to drink. Confidential documents show that the authority and the Conservative government were deeply concerned that the incident would endanger the then impending water privatisation.

Hundreds of people complained of skin burns, rashes, ulcers, sore mouths and joints, memory loss and other symptoms, which they attributed to the aluminium and other metals that the chemical had dissolved from supply pipes. Their complaints were dismissed after controversial inquiries held by the water authority and by the Department of Health.

But research published by the British Medical Journal concluded that the "poisoning probably led to long-term cerebral impairment in some people in Camelford".

The authority was prosecuted, but merely fined £10,000, and paid out just £400,000 in compensation, shared between 148 victims.

Campaigners now hope that the increasing evidence that Mrs Cross died from a strange disease as a result of the pollution will reawaken public concern.

Doug Cross, her husband, believes that 20 other people have died as a result of the disaster and that more cases are emerging. He says experts said at the time it would take 20 years for the effects to be known, adding: "It is now nearly 20 years."

Graham Sillifant says his wife, Sarah, who was in her twenties when she was exposed to the water, hanged herself last year after suffering dementia and other similar symptoms to Mrs Cross. He said yesterday: "It could well have been the water that was to blame."

Labour MP Michael Meacher, who visited Camelford as environment minister, calls the incident and its aftermath "a most unbelievable scandal".

South West Water, which succeeded the old authority after privatisation, says it has

"nothing further to add to the already comprehensive detail available on the issue".

#### JOAN KING'S STORY

Three months after Joan King drank the water she started to experience "very peculiar imperfections" in her speech. She now finds it difficult to concentrate, and has other Alzheimer's-like symptoms. When tired, she says, "I get so frustrated and because I can't express myself, I gather, I get almost unbearable". Her husband, Roger, says that though a normally peaceful person she becomes virtually uncontrollable. Tests have revealed high concentrations of aluminium in her fingernails and toenails. She says: "I was a metallurgist. But here I am now - half a person mentally."

#### CAROLE CROSS'S STORY

Doug Cross, above, and his wife, Carole, avoided drinking the water after spotting that there was something wrong with it while making a cup of tea. But Carole had a bath in it, and the water turned bright blue. She developed eczema and sore joints and found it difficult to raise her arms above her shoulders. An artist, she had to give up her work as Alzheimer's-like symptoms rapidly increased. Eventually, she became unable to speak or eat, and died. A post-mortem found high concentrations of aluminium in her brain, in different patterns from those usual for Alzheimer's victims.

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<http://www.charleston.net/stories/?newsID=81741&section=localnews>

#### **Woman claims poisoning Former water plant guard says chemical cloud made her sick BY KYLE STOCK**

The Post and Courier

On Dec. 24, Ava Morris was thinking about her 11-year-old son and making her rounds as a security guard at the Santee Cooper water-treatment plant in Moncks Corner. It was a silent night, uneventful, until she encountered a cloud of chemicals. "It looked like Christmas; it looked like snow," Morris said. "In all honesty, for a moment I panicked, because I wasn't sure what to do, so I just ran straight through it and went upstairs and told the engineer."

The same thing happened the next night. Two days later Morris, a 42-year-old single mother of two, was unemployed, bedridden, struggling to breathe and facing a stack of medical bills. The "snow" that she walked through was sodium fluorosilicate, a chemical used to treat drinking water that can cause bone damage and irritate the skin, eyes and respiratory system. In large doses, sodium fluorosilicate can be fatal. Morris' incident is the second time safety has been questioned at the 11-year-old Santee Cooper water plant, a facility that uses concentrated chemicals to treat water going to about 120,000 homes and businesses in Berkeley and Dorchester counties. In October 2000, Thomas A. Moore, a 33-year-old operator at the facility, died in his chair during a night shift at the plant. Medical examiners originally attributed the death to an irregular heartbeat caused by a slightly enlarged heart, but they were not told that the day before Moore died, he had noted in the plant log book that an ammonia leak had occurred.

After an investigation by The Post and Courier and Moore's family, two pathologists concluded that Moore's death was most consistent with a lethal dose of ammonia gas. In May, a Berkeley County Coroner changed the cause of Moore's death to "undetermined."

#### A short stay

Ava Morris was far from an ideal employee. She had to walk to work or bum rides, and the demands of raising two children often disrupted her work schedule. She was hired by Security Management of South Carolina LLC in November and she had two marks on her record in a matter of weeks. On one occasion, Morris took off work for the funeral of one of her daughter's high school friends. Another night, she swerved the company pickup truck into a building, she said to avoid two deer.

But Morris said that she was just doing her job on Christmas Eve and the night after. She said the fluoride cloud poured under a metal door and obscured the walkway in front of her. When Morris ran through the chemical fog and reported it to the controller on duty, he said he would take care of it and told Morris that she would be all right, according to a Dec. 30 report written by Plant Manager William Robinson. But her throat started bothering her shortly thereafter, and on the morning of Dec. 27, Morris said she went to work with two memos: one asked for shorter shifts and the other detailing her exposure to the fluoride cloud a few nights earlier and her ensuing symptoms.

"I have been having trouble breathing," she wrote. "It feels as though something is constantly caught in my throat. ... I did not report it because the engineer assured me that I would be OK. Now, I'm not so sure."

As Morris began work that morning a gate swung shut on the truck - her third strike. When Robert Marek, Morris' supervisor, arrived on the scene, Morris said she gave him the two memos just before she was told to turn in her badge and gun. This is the claim that Morris will make to the state Workers' Compensation Commission in the near future.

Marek's account is slightly different. In a Jan. 3 statement written to Santee Cooper management, Marek said that he found Morris' memo about the fluoride exposure on his desk later that morning. Security Management has fought Morris' claim. The Sumter-based company, which has 600 guards on its payroll, refused to discuss the case, because, it said, the case is still pending.

Santee Cooper confirmed that there was spilled fluoride at its water treatment plant on Dec. 24 and 25, but said its inspectors did not find unsafe levels of the chemical when they examined the plant Dec. 27. Santee Cooper spokesman Laura Varn said the utility wonders about the motives behind Morris' accusations.

"We really question the timing of all of this," Varn said. "It's ironic to us that this happened on the 24th and the 25th and she didn't tell anyone at that time. Yet, within an hour of when ... she was asked to leave, this all of a sudden becomes an issue."

#### Seeking answers

On Dec. 30, Dr. Jeffrey Santi, a Moncks Corner-based family physician, wrote in a

unaddressed memo that Morris had a cough, "bronchospasms" and headaches because of the sodium fluorosilicate she encountered at work.

At the time, he said she should fully recover in five to seven days. But in the following weeks, Morris' hair started falling out, she developed a rash on her arms and back, and she continued to be wracked with convulsive fits of coughing. At the same time, her medical bills climbed to almost \$2,400.

Three months after the incident, climbing a small flight of stairs still left Morris breathless and coughing, clutching at her son's asthma respirator. Morris can no longer shoot hoops with her son and she has trouble walking him to the school-bus stop. Her medical bills are unpaid and she has been unable to see a pulmonary specialist. She spends her days making paper flowers and planning baby showers for extra money.

Morris probably never would have worked at the water-treatment plant had it not been for Moore's death six years earlier. In part because Moore's body was undiscovered for about 10 hours, Santee Cooper made a policy of posting a security guard at the facility around the clock. It also added other safeguards designed to alert emergency responders if a plant operator is unable to do his job.

Varn pointed out that 2005 was the utility's safest year since it started compiling injury data in 1982. Santee Cooper recorded 55 work-related incidents in 2005, including 25 "preventable" vehicle accidents.

"The safety of the employees in the work environment in which we operate has always been top priority with us," Varn said.

Morris, however, said her training did not detail what to do in the event of a chemical spill or how and when to use a respirator. Security Management would not discuss its training procedures, because it said that would compromise the employees' safety. Government safety officials were not alerted to Morris' poisoning, because federal law does not require companies to report incidents to the Occupational Health and Safety Administration unless they involve a fatality or at least three injured workers, according to OSHA spokesman Jim Knight. The agency was never alerted about Morris' exposure.

Morris wants her medical bills paid and she wants to see a lung doctor, but what she wants most is for Santee Cooper to acknowledge that the water plant was a dangerous place to be on the night of her injury. Two parents, a sister and a widow have spent the past five years seeking the same recognition about the night that Thomas Moore died.

"I don't want justice; I just want somebody to say that this happened ... and I want them to stop playing this shell game," Morris said. "Had it gone another way, I could have died in my sleep and nobody would have known anything but what Santee Cooper said."

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