

Lorna Wilson – EMF Radiation caused cancer in her workplace

Lorna Wilson – Ontario, 2000 + Update May 22, 2006
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From: Lorna Wilson
To: mwente@globeandmail.com
Sent: Monday, May 22, 2006 9:42 PM
Subject: Re: 'Chasing the Cancer Answer'

Dear Editor:

The journalism by Margaret Wente needs to be delved into a little further in my opinion.

I am a breast cancer survivor who refuses to be a victim, I choose to be an activist.

I never asked "why me" because I know the answer to that question. I, along with eight of my co-workers were all diagnosed with cancer within months of each other. My workplace was the cause of my cancer. I too was called a fear monger for trying to inform my co-workers of the hazard lurking within our workplace. You can't taste it, smell it, see it or eliminate it but you sure as hell could avoid it if you knew it was there.

What do you do when your employer owns TV and newspapers across the country? Do you think they print our side of the story as we see it? You can bet our case was as unbalanced as journalism can get.

Before I was diagnosed with breast cancer, I did not know anyone with cancer of any kind. Within months I knew nine people and they all coincidentally worked on the same floor of a seven story office building as I did. This had nothing to do with age. These women were in the early thirties and forties if you consider that old age.

Who ever told you it's the dose and not the chemical that counts? One speck of asbestos breathed into your lungs can cause cancer. Your father, working in an asbestos factory, brought this carcinogen home on his clothes.

For your information "THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SAFE EXPOSURE to any carcinogen" and "NO PROOF DOES NOT EQUATE TO NO HARM".

The Canadian Cancer Society should be ashamed of themselves for letting someone so uninformed answer or should I say not answer Wendy's questions. A person speaking for the CCS should know about all cancer causes and all cancers and not pretend to be unaware of what carcinogens are sitting on the shelves of all stores to be sold to an unknowing public.

PREVENTION IS THE CURE FOR CANCER and the sooner we learn that fact, the better off we'll all be.

Lorna Wilson
May 22, 2006

A phenomenon known as a **cancer cluster** took place on a single floor of a seven storey office building in Hamilton, Ontario. Nine co-workers were diagnosed with cancer within months of each other. The experts hired by the Company claimed that it was nothing but a "mere coincidence" or "we all had incredibly bad luck."

There is no known cause of breast cancer and yet our employer and their expert's believe that our cancers happened anywhere but there! Trish, Maureen and I refused to be victims, we chose to be activists!

We began to research the health effects of electromagnetic fields. We were all in various stages of chemotherapy at the time. We had plenty of time to read and keep each other updated. Our main concern was to get the other sixty women off that floor.

Labour Canada's, Occupational Health and Safety representative, said "there is no proof the electromagnetic fields cause cancer, but if it could, then I most likely got cancer from something in my home, perhaps my hair-blower".

I wondered why he felt that using a hair-blower for a couple of minutes a day, three or four times a week could cause cancer, but working on a VDT for twelve hour days, six and seven days a week, could not? It defied my sense of logic!

Canadian Cancer Statistics does not track "cancer clusters". The statistics expert told me that clusters always turn out to be coincidence so they don't bother tracking them. But I believe that cancer clusters are nature's way of saying something is going wrong here.

Dr. Samuel Epstein, one of the world's leading experts in cancer said **six women getting breast cancer between the age of thirty and forty was overwhelming**. He also said that cancer's such as ours occurs once in six hundred women not six out of sixty-five women.

Estrogen receptor positive breast cancer is a highly unusual event and considered rare for pre-menopausal women. Positive receptors are becoming more and more frequent in younger women but the reason for this is unknown.

To stop the spread of our estrogen positive breast cancers, Trish, Maureen and I were given a drug called Tamoxifen. Unfortunately, Tamoxifen is ineffective if you are exposed to electromagnetic fields. Could this explain why Trish and Maureen both had recurrences after returning to work?

THIS IS OUR STORY

The first diagnosis came in November 1994. Trish Balon was thirty-one years old and the mother of three small girls. WHAT A SHAME! was our reaction....

Next was Maureen Steeves, the girl with the Farrah Faucett hair. Thirty-seven years old and the mother of three young boys and a baby girl.

WHAT A COINCIDENCE.... these two close friends both had the same type of breast cancer. I was diagnosed third. I found my lump on New Years Eve and the diagnosis was confirmed January 10th, 1996. Cancer was

certainly a devastating diagnosis. It left me feeling numb, alone and hopeless at times. I had a son who was still in school and I thought I was going to die.

I worried about how my husband and son would cope without me and my pay cheque. I cashed in all my RRSPs! I wanted everything to seem as normal as possible for as long as possible. I could not form a vision of my sixty-five birthday so what was the point of saving for it?

I was unable to make plans for the future. I could only handle the amount of time I had between doctors appointments. As long as they made another appointment, I expected I would still be around for it.

I felt guilty for being off work and leaving my co-workers to cope with my heavy workload along with their own. Guilty for getting cancer and leaving my co-workers to wonder who would be next, and guilty knowing that my own sister and Maureen's sister, were among them.

I felt guilty that my mother and father had to take care of me when I should have been taking care of them. I felt guilty that my husband had six weeks vacation but no vacation plans being made. Instead, he took his vacation in days so that he could accompany me to all of my appointments.

I felt guilty that my husband and son would have to do my share of household chores because I couldn't lift my head off the pillow. Chemotherapy zapped every ounce of energy I had.

Fatigue, pain and fear consumed our lives and daily medication was a constant reminder of my condition. I suffered from severe memory loss. I lost the ability to spell and put the events of my life into chronological order. It was impossible to carry on an intelligent conversation because my mouth could not say the words my brain was trying to relay. My memory was so impaired that I would repeat the same thing over and over. My husband would kid me and say at least he knew I wasn't lying because I would tell the same story over, and over and over.

I was frustrated every time someone said don't you remember. People I had known for years, suddenly didn't look familiar and I gave up trying to remember names. You can imagine how difficult it was to do my research on EMF's and keep the issue straight in my mind. I had to record everything people said to me on index cards and in note binders so I could refer back to them. Jokes were made about me because I carried my thoughts around in a recipe box. They thought I was going to share recipes during information sessions with the Company. Instead, when studies and experts were referred to, I could pull my index card and know the results of those studies and the opinions of the experts at a glance.

When the Company expert told the employees that there were no known health effects caused by EMF's, I was able to stand and read a very long list of health issues which had been linked to EMF exposure. A list I had compiled during my own research.

EMFs have been linked to:

1. Parkinson's disease
2. Autism (prenatal exposure is suspected)
3. Downs syndrome (Trisomy 21)
4. Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD)
5. Behavioural problems
6. SIDS (Sudden Infant Death Syndrome) (low melatonin levels are found in their brains)
7. Idiopathic Environmental Intolerance (hypersensitivity to EMF's)
8. Leukemia
9. Allergies with symptoms of:
 - a. Debilitating fatigue
 - b. Depression
 - c. Decreased memory
 - d. Sleep disturbance
 - e. Disorientation
 - f. Unusual behaviours and
 - g. Convulsions (Symptom's which dissipate when exposure stops)
10. Chronic Fatigue Immune Dysfunction Syndrome also known as: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome, Low natural killer cell syndrome, Epstein-Barr virus, Chronic mononucleosis and Yuppie flu, with symptoms of :
 - a. Debilitating fatigue
 - b. Low grade fevers
 - c. Sore throats
 - d. Tender or swollen lymph nodes
 - e. Heart irregularities
 - f. Inability to concentrate
 - g. Mental disorientation
 - h. Visual and sleep disturbances
 - i. Abnormal weight change +/-
 - j. Profound muscle pain and weakness

Brain tumors are considered to be markers for EMF exposure.

With EMF exposure, you will notice

1. An increase in miscarriages and birth defects
2. Increases in cancer incidence
3. Altered blood pressure
4. Chronic stress
5. Immune system dysfunctions
6. Changes in white and red blood cell counts
7. An increased metabolism
8. Stimulation of the thyroid
9. Chronic fatigue and
10. Headaches

The employees were shocked to hear my list.

When questioned about the Boston Breast Cancer Study y Patricia Coogan the Company's expert denied having any knowledge of it. Trish had to remind him that he quoted this study as a reference in his own study, which we had a copy of at the meeting.

I believe that the manner in which our employer handled this cancer cluster case, resulted in my current condition of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. It's no wonder I live in fear of going back to work! Six of my co-workers have now lost their lives. A constant reminder to me of the ultimate devastation caused by this disease. I fear that I too will lose my life if I return to work.

Once again, I feel guilty that I should live, when others with young children have died.

Before I was diagnosed, cancer had never touched my life. But by November 1996, just a few short months later, I knew eight other young co-workers with cancer. (6 breast, 1 brain, and 2 colon). We had our own cancer support group.

But it didn't end there. Two other co-workers were diagnosed with benign brain tumors. The Company's Medical Director refused to acknowledge these tumors because they were not cancerous. Brain tumors occur about once in one hundred thousand people. We had three on the third floor. How could this be!!!

In a cohort of sixty-five employees, about twenty employees had tumors of some kind or other, but only nine were cancerous so all the others were ignored.

Late summer 1999, a tenth employee was diagnosed, this time it was stomach cancer. Cindy also worked on the third floor. Stomach cancer is very rare, with Canada having the third lowest incidence rate in the world. It most often occurs after the age of fifty and men are twice as likely as women to be diagnosed with this type of cancer. Cindy died within a couple of weeks of finding out. She was thirty-one years old.

With each new diagnosis of cancer we thought that maybe now the Company would listen to us, but that was not the case. By the ninth diagnosis, we knew, they would never say it was caused by something within our workplace, even if all the employees on the third floor had cancer. So there we were, three very sick women looking for answers!

The Company wanted to carry on with "business as usual" but we were creating problems by asking too many questions, wanting too many answers.

We were accused of being "fear mongers" and became known as "the agitators". We felt abandoned! And we wanted to be heard! The Union representing Maureen and I gave up on us, saying "this was bigger than they could handle" and they handed our case over to the Company to deal with at a Corporate level. We had been abandoned again! I resented paying my Union dues.

Trish on the other hand, was a member of the Communications, Energy and Paperworkers Union. This union took the three of us under their wing. It never occurred to them to let Maureen and I battle this out on our own. They referred to us as "Sisters" and treated us with dignity and respect. Our WCB cases were filed together and have stayed together in spite of efforts to separate them. Maureen and I were never treated as if we owed the CEP anything.

Our rep., Joel Carr, encouraged us to speak and be heard. Often making the arrangements himself for us to attend different Union events.

In our unscientific approach to find answers, we compiled a list of what we had in common besides cancer.

- We were hired within the same year
- By the same company
- To work on the same floor
- Working on the same type of equipment
- In very crowded working conditions
- Twelve hour days, often six and seven days a week
- Each of us using multiple VDT's in order to do our jobs

We also knew that we:

- Had none of the known risk factors for breast cancer
- We had high estrogen receptor positive cancers
- And that our type of cancer is very rare in young women our ages.

We set up an investigative committee to try and find the cause of our cancers. It was during one of these sessions that I first heard the term electromagnetic fields. Our search for answers had begun.

I read every book on EMF's at my local library.

I needed to understand how EMF's were created and what harm they could do. I learned that EMF's are not like electricity. Where electricity travels in a straight line, EMF's travel outward from the electrical source in a circular pattern. At our work-stations, we not only sat in the electromagnetic fields created by our own computers, but also in the fields created by the electrical equipment which surrounded us from other workstations. I also learned that the EMF's from electrical appliances can be significantly reduced simply by redesigning the wiring configuration inside the product. The further apart the wiring is, the higher the amount of EMF emission. So by designing products with wiring that is closer together, would virtually eliminate some EMF emissions.

The only true safeguard is distance. Move away from electrical devices and their effects are eliminated.

The level of EMF exposure at Trish, Maureen's and my workstations were extremely high. But the test results presented by the Company experts were averaged. This of course, reduced the exposure limits reported in the media as well below standard exposure limits.

It became very important to me, that the personal exposure levels of Trish, Maureen and I, be used when presenting our case so that the true impact would be revealed. The Company agreed to meet with the employees of the third floor in August of 1996. This was to be an information session where the experts could present test results and answer questions asked by the employees. The employees were in a state of panic. They didn't know what or who to believe.

The documents provided to me at this session were dated the year before. I thought it was a typo, but apparently, the Company and the testing firm had agreed to use 5,000 mG as a safe level of exposure to EMF's a year prior to the cluster even appearing!

Pat Coogan said that at these levels, we should all have curly hair. At this point, the three of us didn't even have hair. The day after this session, an employee refused to work for fear that the workplace might be hazardous to her health. Labour Canada was called in to investigate.

Labour Canada, however, did not conduct one single test. They did not question any of the survivors, nor did they question any of the working employees. They only considered the test results that the Company provided them with. Test results, which were nothing more than a snapshot in time which did not represent our working environment. These tests were conducted in June 1996, eight months after more than one half of all the employees and their equipment had been removed from the floor.

The Company also removed wiring from the ceiling and changed the electrical transformer saying it no longer met the requirements of the building. How could this be! With hardly anyone left, why couldn't it handle the balance of electrical needs?

Labour Canada still came to the conclusion that there was nothing on the third floor that could harm anyone. They ordered the woman back to work.

When I wrote to Labour Canada about their statement the building is safe, I was told to direct my questions to my employer. I wasn't aware that the Company were experts in EMF's.. I thought they were experts in phone service!

I had asked the Company if there were other cancer clusters at other locations and they had said no! I later found out that several other work locations had cancer clusters but their concerns were, as the company put it being dealt with on a one-to-one basis.

IF THERE WERE OTHER CLUSTERS, HOW COULD THEY ALL BE DUE TO COINCIDENCE?

I left work in January 1996, and since then I have been advised of seventy two other employees who have been diagnosed with cancer. At the business office in St. Catharines, there were twelve employees, more than half have breast cancer. Although they supported one another, it never occurred to them to suspect their cancers were related to their workplace, that was until they read the Chatelaine article.

I wrote to every expert that I had either heard of or read about and I attended every conference I came across which had EMF exposure on the agenda. I was asked to sit on a panel, with EMF experts from around the world at the 1st World Conference on Breast Cancer, and tell our story.

I made a list of all the employees who worked on this floor. And as word got around, employees started calling my home to make sure that they and their friends had been included. Even some Managers called me! My list quickly grew to almost six hundred names.

Dr. Theriault advised the Company that even though we had twelve times the number of cancers as should be expected in a group our size, that the actual cause may never be known. He also advised the Company and the employees that a cancer registry should be set-up to track the third floor employees for at least another five years.

The Company claimed that they didn't have the ability or the resources to produce a list of past and present employees. So I offered to share my list with them, only to be asked to stop taking names and let the Company take care of it.

Canadian Cancer Statistics has refused to release the registry information to me saying it is a privacy issue. I had not asked them for names, I simply wanted the numbers.

The Company brought many experts on board to SQUASH EMPLOYEE FEAR.

We questioned every one of the experts! We felt we had a right to ask questions and receive honest answers. Trish, Maureen and I had done our homework and we were not afraid to speak up. We wanted the employees to be informed regarding current information about EMF's and cancer. They had the right to know that EMF's have been linked to many adverse health issues.

Trish often said once you are told that you are going to die, there isn't anything the Company could say or do that could frighten her more!

The committee had requested that the Company tag and store all the third floor computers so they could be made available for further independent testing. However, the Company dismantled the third floor down to the bare concrete and had it hauled away in a hazardous waste bin. The floor stayed this way until the building was sold and turned into condo's,

Trish, Maureen and I were nominated for the Clifton Grant Award in spring of 1997. Our efforts were being recognized...

Our story was written about in a book called Workplace Roulette: Gambling with Cancer.

Maureen died in October 1997.

Trish and I took part in a TVO video called Before Their Time two weeks later. The video was first shown at the Ontario Federation of Labour in Toronto in November 1997, which sparked many requests for Trish and I to come and speak. Having had three pregnancies during

her employment, Trish was very concerned about her girls being part of the first generation of children who would be using VDTs from kinder-garden on up.

Our employer had donated thousands of used computers to the Computers for Schools Program". These computers were not tested for EMF exposure levels and were not "proven" to be safe for use by our children.

Trish and I went to the girls school to express our concerns and they were very compassionate, concerned, and compliant with our suggestions for a safer computer lab set-up.

Because this school listened and acted upon our concerns, it gave us the drive to take it one step further.

Trish, Joel Carr, Maureen's family and I formed a committee called SEEC (Safe EMF Environment Committee). We wrote up and presented a proposal to the Hamilton-Wentworth School Board to encourage them to rearrange computer labs to ensure that children and their teachers were not exposed to potentially hazardous EMF's. The board agreed that our concerns needed to be addressed. Trish and I went on to visit many schools with the proposal and our suggestions were always welcomed by concerned teachers.

The Company hired Dr. Theriault, an epidemiologist from McGill University to take a look at all the test results and Present his report to the employees of the third floor. In November 1996, we met with the Company for the second time. I Asked Management for a copy of any information they had which proved to them beyond a doubt that our cancers were not work related. They gave me nothing!

The Company asked the employees what it was they wanted? The employees asked to be moved to another floor. And so it was done with much grumbling from Management regarding the cost for the move.

After this, both the Company and the CTEA quit all contact with us. The line had been drawn in the sand and it became Us vs The Company".

COMMENTS MADE TO US

- My hair-blower was the culprit
- There is no proof that EMF's cause cancer
- This is a classic coincidental cluster that happened by chance. In 1996, there were one hundred and six cancer clusters in the world. One hundred and five had been declared coincidental random clusters that happened by chance.
- It is just a mere coincidence (this is the one that would drive Trish over the edge.....)
- We all have incredibly bad luck
- Shouldn't you spend what time you have left with your families instead of looking for answers that aren't there?
- All the test results were well below acceptable standards (Canada has no standards!) The Company agreed with the testing firm to use 5,000 mG as the acceptable level of exposure, Sweden is the only country with a Standard which is set at 2 mG. BUT REMEMBER, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS SAFE EXPOSURE!

The Company believes that our cancer came from anywhere but there...

We wondered why the burden of proof was on three sick women. Why did the Company say, there is no proof so we would never be able to prove anything.

NO PROOF DOES NOT EQUATE TO NO HARM!

It simply means there is no proof it causes cancer and no proof that it doesn't! Why were our concerns not being addressed? What did the Company know about EMF's before our situation even surfaced? Why did they already have all the answers? Had they already dealt with this problem? Their answer to me was NO!

Why didn't they want to get to the bottom of this cancer epidemic? Why did they abandon us? Knowledge gave us hope and strength to keep up this fight, and the support we received from the members of CEP, OFL, CAW and USW validated our beliefs and gave us our voice.

On May 9th, 1998, Trish and I won the Cancer Prevention Award at the Clifton Grant ceremonies in Windsor, Ontario. Along with the award, we were given the title of Whistle-blowers. An honour we were proud to accept.

In October 1998, we were featured in an article in Chatelaine Magazine.

Trish died on November 21, 1999.

My life was changed forever. I lost my biggest cancer supporter. I still had a purpose and a need to survive. I have to keep telling our story about an invisible killer called EMF's.

I want to protect my family, friends and co-workers from EMF's and cancer. I want justice for the seven children Maureen and Trish left behind. And I need to be heard!

Cancer has been the most incredible learning experience in my life.

I've learned passion and I took a stand by doing something about EMF's because it's important to me. I gather determination when I speak out. I believe that I can make a difference towards safer workplaces by speaking up.

I've learned that networking with others helps me to remember I am not alone in this fight.

Most important, I've learned that I can make a difference in other peoples lives by sharing my experience so that they may be spared the same fate.

I miss Trish and Maureen and the support they gave me, and I will continue the fight for "electromagnetic fields" to be recognized by the Workplace Safety and Insurance Board as a probable human carcinogen.

I want you to know how to reduce EMF exposure in your own daily life.

LORNA'S EMF DO'S/DON'TS LIST

1. When using an electric blanket, plug it in one half hour before retiring and then unplug it "before" you get into bed. Even if you turn the blanket off, the electric source is still on and there is no clearance between the blanket and your body.
2. Put your baby monitor across the room from where your baby sleeps. You will still be able to hear your baby, but will be lowering the risk of EMF exposure.
3. Move your electric alarm clock away from your head. If it is on a nightstand, chances are it is only inches from your brain.
4. Don't plug your bedroom lamps into the electrical outlets behind the headboard.
5. Keep your children at least 1 meter away from the TV while watching it. Push your computer to the very back of the desk with the back against an outside wall.
6. Check for computer set-ups in your children's school and make sure they are at least one meter apart and "never" back to back. The ideal situation is for the backs of computers to face outside walls. The highest emissions come from the back left hand corner where the fly-back transformer is located.
7. Ask if your school participates in the Computers for Schools program. Government and industry donate used office equipment for school use. Ask if these computers have been tested for EMF exposure limits.
8. Refuse to allow your child to sit where EMF emissions are over 2 mG. 0 mG is of course the best scenario.
9. Give up your waterbed. There is no clearance between you and the heat source for your bed. It is believed that a large number of miscarriages occur during the winter due to the increased use of waterbed heaters at that time of year.
10. Give up your electric can opener and return to the manual kind. FOOD FOR THOUGHT!

If you think you are too small to make a difference, you have never spent the night, in a tent, with a mosquito!