



April 13, 2003

COMPLETE FORECAST

Current Temp **42°**

- [Home](#)
- [Local News](#)
- [Business](#)
- [Sparks Today](#)
- [Weather](#)
- [The Classifieds](#)
- [Obituaries](#)
- [Nation/World](#)
- [Sports](#)
- [Entertainment](#)
- [Outdoors](#)
- [Life](#)
- [Opinion](#)
- [Columnists](#)
- [Real Estate](#)
- [Extras](#)
- [Weddings & Announcements](#)
- [Coupons](#)
- [Legislature](#)

RGJ Newsletters

- Breaking News
- Morning Briefing
- Reno Tahoe Fun

Sign Up

Customer Help Desk

- ▶ Customer Help
- ▶ **Advertise with us**
- ▶ Place classified ad
- ▶ Contact Us
- ▶ EZAccess Subscription Manager
- ▶ Literacy Outreach
- ▶ Subscribe
- ▶ Renew
- ▶ Send us a news tip
- ▶ Letter to the editor
- ▶ Jobs at the RGJ

Promotions

- ▶ Get a Sunday paper for only .99¢ at Wal-Mart
- ▶ Great RGJ.com Giveaways
- ▶ Join a Focus Group

View photos, floorplans, and more!

Choose a state

apartments.com™

Search

Search R

Enter

NEW Tw

NEWS ENTERTAINMENT **Go to RENO & TAHOE VISITORS GUIDE** the CLASSIFIEDS

Jobs Stuff Wheels

Trees show tungsten increase in two leukemia towns

Frank X. Mullen Jr.
 RENO GAZETTE-JOURNAL
 8/27/2002 11:19 pm

Environmental levels of the metal tungsten appear to have increased in both Fallon and Sierra Vista, Ariz., over the past 20 years, according to tree ring analysis conducted as part of an investigation into leukemia clusters in both towns.

The tree core sample results, obtained Tuesday by the Reno Gazette-Journal, mirror urine tests conducted by federal officials on 205 Fallon residents that showed unexpected high levels of tungsten in their bodies.

Tungsten is an especially hard metal used to make jet engine turbine blades and other industrial products. An industrial plant in Fallon uses it to make tools.

Studies link tungsten compounds to health risks in the workplace, but no studies have been done on dissolved tungsten -- the kind found in the Fallon residents' urine.

The tests on seven trees are the first time tree rings have been used to assist a cancer cluster investigation. No one knows why the tungsten levels increased or from where the metal is coming.

"What are the odds that two desert towns 1,000 miles apart, that both have leukemia clusters and military bases, also have high levels of tungsten?" asked Mark Witten, a toxicologist at the University of Arizona who is using his own funds to study Fallon and Sierra Vista. "The data from the tree ring analysis shows we're on to something. We're getting results on a shoestring now, but it's time somebody steps in with some bucks so we can do this study properly."

On Tuesday, Witten sent the test results to the federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and other federal and state agencies studying the Fallon leukemia cluster.

The Fallon cluster includes 16 children diagnosed with leukemia since 1997, three of whom have died. Sierra Vista has seven cases of childhood leukemia since 1995, but health officials there say they don't have the resources to investigate possible environmental causes of the epidemic.

The tree-ring analysis found various increases and decreases in several metals -- including cobalt, lead, tin, zinc and chromium -- in both areas.

But the only glaring similarity between the two communities was the elevated tungsten levels, according to the test results. Tungsten levels were up 45 percent in Fallon and 72 percent in

Other Stories

- ▶ From the archives: The Fallon leukemia cluster
- ▶ Photo gallery: Leukemia mystery in Fallon and Arizona
- ▶ Leukemia ties Fallon with town in Arizona
- ▶ Latest news in brief from northern Nevada
- ▶ Latest news in brief from northern Nevada
- ▶ Sparks nightclub owner again cited for blocking fire exits
- ▶ John Wayne Bobbitt headed to Nevada prison
- ▶ Circus comes to Reno

[E-Mail This Article](#)

[Printer-Friendly Version](#)

[Subscribe to the paper online](#)

Find



apa

Cli Y

Loc

The comj sour reale



Fin

▶ 20 Guic
▶ Vi car'



Car

Tun nex



RGJ

Sigr and min Pho



FACE-OFF IRAQ
Confronting Saddam



7 U.S. POWs rescued, safe; families react
LATEST REPORTS

- [Families of soldiers killed in ambush rejoice at POWs' return](#)
- [Ecstatic family awaits return of freed POW](#)

CLICK for in-depth coverage from USA TODAY, Gannett News Service and other Gannett media

Spring into a Better Job!

Sierra Vista during the period studied, test results indicate.

"This is an incredible breakthrough," said Assemblywoman Marcia de Braga, D-Fallon. "It's a necessity that funding be found to continue Dr. Witten's research. This isn't a nine-to-five job for him; it's a passion to get at the truth and help the children."

Randall Todd, Nevada state epidemiologist, said Witten's results are interesting and the tungsten issue needs to be explored. He said because no one knows what the normal variation of tungsten in tree rings is, saying what the variation in the metal means is difficult.

"It's a pilot study, so we don't really know if it really reflects what's in the environment or what normal variation is," he said. "We get one answer and it raises 20 questions."

Witten said he will ask the CDC to do blood and urine tests in Sierra Vista so that the results can be compared to the Fallon biological studies. He said more trees in both areas should be tested for metals, solvents and fuels, especially trees nearest to the homes of the Fallon and Sierra Vista leukemia patient families.

"The results show that tree ring data can be used to assist in this investigation," Witten said. "Tungsten may not be the answer to the cause of the leukemia clusters, but it could be part of the answer. It could be a co-factor. We need to investigate further. We need to get on this."



Top

© Copyright Reno Gazette-Journal, a Gannett Co. Inc. Newspaper. Use of this site signifies agreement to our [terms of service](#) (updated 12/17/2002).

Need Help Planning Your Wedding? *of course!*

