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Inquiry ordered into birth defects linked to pollution

Chris Benfield

A MAJOR investigation has been ordered into links between pollution and clusters of birth defects which have been identified in areas as different as inner-city Sheffield and rural North Yorkshire.

It is the first official acknowledgement that the curious pattern of abnormal births - revealed in the Yorkshire Post - might be a cause for concern.

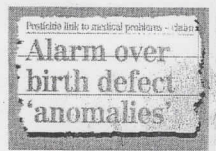
The Government pollution watchdog the Health Protection Agency (HPA) confirmed yesterday there were anomalies which needed explaining and that birth defects would be included in national research.

It will pay particular attention to the possibility of poisoning from waste dumps such as the tip at Parkwood, in the heart of Burngreave, Sheffield, which takes ash from the equally controversial city rubbish incinerator.

Birth abnormalities, childhood cancers, low birth weight and asthma, will be among the areas for investigation.

The HPA, a semi-independent government-funded body, has been investigating possible links between pollution and illness in the West Midlands.

Dr Patrick Saunders, who runs the research programme concerned, said: "The West Midlands pilot mapped data on potential sources of environmental contamination and data on


Pesticide link to medical problems - claim

Alarm over birth defect 'anomalies'

Flashback: How the Yorkshire Post first broke the news two weeks ago.

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Their biggest problem is a lack of records directly measuring poisoning by pollution.

Two weeks ago, the Yorkshire Post reported on work by Dick van Steenis, a former GP who has become an expert on air-borne pollution, and his assistant, Michael Ryan, a former civil engineer who lost two children to mysterious illnesses.

Their figures suggested Mid Devon had a particularly high risk of birth defects and so did most of Wales. Sheffield and North East Lincolnshire were hotspots and so was the area covered by the health authority for Scarborough, Whitby and Ryedale. Other health indicators, like cancer and asthma statistics, showed similar patterns.

Sheffield had 40 defects per thousand babies overall. North East Lincolnshire had 37 per thousand, 10 times the rate for Wakefield.

Mr Van Steenis and Mr

HARRY AT 21: The first major interview Camilla is no 'wicked ste

Close relationship: The picture of Prince Harry with his elder brother William, taken by photographer Mario Testino to mark Harry's

Misunderstood... but I am w

PRINCE Harry turns 21 today and in a frank interview praises the Duchess of Cornwall – denying she is the "wicked stepmother."

Speaking publicly for the first time about the Duchess, the third in line to the throne insisted his father's new wife had always been very close to him and Prince William.

He also talked about his girlfriend Chelsy Davy and his infamous Nazi uniform stunt in the major interview to mark his milestone birthday.

He apologised for dressing up in the Nazi uniform for a party earlier this year.

"Maybe it was a sign of my own immaturity. That was then, this is now. I am becoming 21 – something like that I will never do again. It was a stupid thing to do. I think it's part of growing up." he said.

And he defended himself for being both a "party prince" and a "caring" one, declaring "I am who I am" and "I'm not going to change".

"I am both of them. If that's a problem with anyone, then I'm very sorry.

"What, does everyone expect me to be just the caring person and not to have a cigarette, not to have a beer?" said Harry, who said he believed he was misunderstood.

He also reiterated his hopes of making his mother proud and spoke of his closeness to brother William and the difficulty of seeing stories about Diana, Princess of Wales, in the papers.

"I mean, ever since our mother died, obviously we were close, but he is the one person on this earth who I can actually really, you know, we can talk about anything," he said.

The Army cadet gave the interviews at his father's Home Farm in G shire wearing a blue and white c shirt, green kha trousers and six bangles on his ri and a leather ba left.

"Is my shirt to pled?" he asked cerned, trying t out the wrinkles hand. "I was tol casual."

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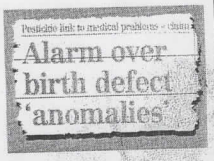
Dr Patrick Saunders, who runs the research programme concerned, said: "The West Midlands pilot mapped data on potential sources of environmental contamination and data on hospital admissions and registrations for diseases such as lung cancer. This enabled possible connections between clusters of disease and possible sites of contamination to be investigated. While the system doesn't prove a link, it does identify areas that need further detailed investigation.

"Over the next year, this pilot study will be further extended to include Wales and will also be focusing on other conditions."

Dr Saunders said it could be that known factors cause the health problems, but added: "You cannot rule out the possibility that some, at least, is due to environmental exposure. There are issues we need to investigate further - in particular, a small but consistent link between land-fill sites and congenital abnormalities."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Mr Van Steenis and Mr Ryan said agricultural chemicals and air-borne pollution, travelling on the wind, could be poisoning rural areas in the same way that incinerators, landfill sites, traffic fumes and industry, combine to create problems in some city areas.

They were supported by Malcolm Hooper, a Sunderland University professor specialising in the effects of chemicals on health.

Prof Hooper said yesterday: "If a government agency has recognised the possible hazards of land-fill sites and other discharges from industrial processes, that is a first. It is about time and it is very good news."

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Haulage firm man stabbed to death in 'territorial dispute'

Lizzie Murphy and **Chris Benfield**

ONE man died and two others were injured after they were stabbed during an apparent territorial dispute at a West Yorkshire haulage company yesterday.

The 36-year-old man who died was believed to be the son of one of the managing directors of M&B Haulage and Waste Paper Co Ltd in Low Mills Lane, Ravensthorpe, near Dewsbury.

The two injured men, aged 62 and 52, were understood to be the joint managing directors of the company. One of the directors, Clive Hoyland, has been a leading campaigner in this week's fuel protests.

Mr Hoyland is also father of three children and chairman of Sandal Rugby Union Football Club. He was formerly a parish councillor for both West Bretton and Woolley.

All three men were taken to Dewsbury District Hospital but the 36-year-old man died in the hospital yesterday afternoon.

The incident happened shortly after noon yesterday when it is understood a man drove up to the gates of the haulage company and rammed into a number of parked cars outside. He then got out of the car and was said to have stabbed the three men.

The incident was believed to have arisen out of a long-standing territorial dispute between two companies. The 62-year-old man was last night in a poorly, but stable condition and the man, 52, was in a stable condition.

A post mortem examination is expected to be carried out on the 36-year-old man today.

Last night a 34-year-old local man had been arrested in connection with the incident and was detained at Dewsbury police station.

Fifth manager gu vulnerable suffer

Alexandra Wood

A JURY has found a fifth manager guilty of failing to act on reports of abuse in a Yorkshire care home.

A jury of six men and six women took nearly six hours to find Dean Smith guilty by a majority of 10-2 at Hull Crown Court.

Smith, of Eastlands, Nafferton, East Yorkshire, now faces a fine when he is sentenced alongside other managers who pleaded guilty at the start of the trial at Hull Crown Court.

In March seven carers from the Bedes View home in east Hull were sentenced to a total of 66 montl after the co severely disable suffered bullyir slapping, and oth

Managers faile witnesses comp carers "were swe the general c started engagi themselves" sa Robertson QC, p

One manager Garner, was standing by w happened in fron

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