Witness says cancer claims misleading

By DALE CURRY

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NEW ORLEANS — The high rate of cancer deaths in southeastern Louisiana is more likely the result of socioeconomic factors than environmental factors, according to a physician with the Brookhaven National Laboratory in Upton, N.Y.

Dr. Leonard Hamilton, who testified Tuesday before the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board, stated in pre-filed testimony that the incidence rate of cancer is a more important measure of pollution effects than is the area's mortality rate from cancer. In incidence rate, or number of cases, he said, Louisiana rates below average in some types of cancer.

Hamilton was a rebuttal witness for Louisiana Power & Light Co., which is trying to obtain an operating license for its Waterford 3 nuclear power plant near Taft.

His testimony was in response to remarks by Dr. John J. Mauro, an LPL consultant and manager of Ebasco Services Inc. regulatory assessment department in New Orleans. Mauro's pre-filed testimony was rebutted Wednesday by Dr. Hamid Reza Pandit, a professor of radiology, University of California School of Medicine at San Francisco, said the March testimony of Dr. Irwin D.J. Bross reflected a "very limited understanding of biology, biophysics, genetics, medicine and radiation biology.

Bross, who is director of research at Roswell P. Park Memorial Institute for Cancer Research in Buffalo, N.Y., said effects from low-level radiation are similar to those from larger doses.

He said Bross appeared ignorant of scientific evidence showing that "inertial, as radiation mutation and cancer induction are concerned, the risk per unit radiation dose at low-dose levels is less than the risk at high-dose levels."

A third rebuttal witness Tuesday was John J. Mauro, an LPL consultant and manager of Ebasco Services Inc. radiological assessment department in New Orleans.

He said that, contrary to prior testimony, leaks of uranium and elements produced by its fissuring process would be so minute at Waterford 3 that quantities released in liquid and gaseous form would be insignificant.

Mauro's pre-filed testimony was countered to that of Dr. Carl Johnson, associate clinical professor of social and environmental health at the University of Colorado School of Medicine, who said he would expect uranium to be released in significant quantities in the reactor effluents from Waterford 3. He said that these releases were not taken into consideration in dose calculations prepared by LPL & the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Hypothesis of the hearing this week at the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals courthouse, the Atomic Safety and Licensing Board will take under consideration the granting of a license to LPL to operate Waterford 3.

Based on the board's recommendation, the NRC will make the final decision. If the license is granted, the nuclear plant in New Orleans is scheduled to begin operation in July 1983.