Louisiana Chemical Association says cancer study methods flawed

By BOB ANDERSON
Environmental editor

A national study used incorrect methods in concluding that Louisiana has a cancer rate far above the national average, according to the Louisiana Chemical Association.

The cancer statistic was one of 35 areas evaluated by the Institute for Southern Studies in ranking Louisiana third from the bottom in its environmental index.

Bob Hall of the institute said the cancer-ranking method was one used by an insurance company to compare states. Had a different ranking system been used, it probably would not have affected how Louisiana ranked in the area of cancer.

And because that area represented only 1/35th of the overall rankings of the state, it is unlikely that using a different method would have resulted in a substantial difference in Louisiana's poor overall ranking, Hall said.

The institute has no reason for wanting to make Louisiana look bad and was surprised by the overall poor showing of southern states in the environmental rankings, Hall said.

"There is no such thing as an age-adjusted population," as cited by the institute's study, says Edward Flynn of LCA in a letter to the institute. "Epidemiologists calculate rates ... from a 'test' population that are age-adjusted to a 'standard population.'

"It is not the population that is age-adjusted, but rather the rate," Flynn says. "What you called an 'age-adjusted population' is without justification and is not found in any reference test I am familiar with.

"To then use this 'age-adjusted population' figure as the denominator for an estimated cancer incidence rate further exacerbates any..."
errors in your non-peer-reviewed report," the LCA letter continues. "Another serious flaw is your use of estimated cancer incidence data, instead of going to the appropriate states or the National Cancer Institute's SEER (Surveillance, Epidemiology, and End Results) program to obtain the true cancer incidence data" for those states that have such data.

Using the method employed by the Institute and American Cancer Society statistics published in 1989, the cancer incidence rate for Louisiana is 422 per 100,000 as compared to 411 per 100,000 for the entire United States, Flynn said. Using data published this year, the Louisiana rate was 380 per 100,000 compared to a national rate of 249 per 100,000.

Flynn said that neither computation support the Institute's conclusion that Louisiana's cancer rates are "more than 150 percent the national rate."

It does appear, however, that the Institute was consistent in its comparisons of one state to another. Flynn said.