Claudia B. Laws

Poisoned by history, economy

Claudia B. Laws, center, of Cow Island listens to lawyers who filed a suit against pesticide manufacturers on the behalf of the David family. The informational gathering was held at Forked Island Elementary School in November.

Arsenic is a naturally occurring metal, but test results of many area wells indicate an environmental and sometimes unhealthy level of arsenic in well water. With Cow Island's coastal geology, it's reasonable to link the higher than expected levels of arsenic in other sources including the cattle dips of years past, says one authority on the subject.

Jan Risher

Cattle pesticides washed used for decades may be source of arsenic, lawsuit claims

Cows walked through large cattle dips — vats filled with a slurry of inorganic arsenical pesticide. As the slurry lost its potency, it had to be changed several times a year. The used slurry was then dumped on neighboring soil, further spreading arsenic.

Cattle pesticide washes used for decades may be source of arsenic, lawsuit claims

A lawsuit — filed in November on behalf of a retired Cow Island couple — says cattle dips are to blame for arsenic contamination in private water wells in the area. The lawsuit seeks relief from the companies that produced the pesticides, the chemical company and any others like this get left out," said attorney Jan Risher.

Used to be, there were no fancy cows. The cows would roam everywhere," said area resident William Gupton. "They would only sell their cow if it was by a ring in the nose or a dip on the left ear. Cow Island is where they kept the cows where they were calling." Cattle killed through large cattle dips — vats filled with a slurry of arsenic were used to wash pesticides. The slurry was then dumped on neighboring soil, further spreading arsenic.

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