Smoking cited as leading La. cancer agent

By BOB ANDERSON
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NEW ORLEANS — Preliminary study findings indicate that smoking is the main cause of lung cancer in Louisiana, although there is an elevated risk for persons living near industrial plants, according to a report given Thursday to the International Lung Cancer Conference.

Dr. Pelayo Correa said statistics attribute 90 percent of the state's lung cancer to smoking and anywhere from 2 to 16 percent to occupational hazards.

Persons who indicated in Correa's survey that they live within two miles of some type of industry had a 40 percent higher risk of lung cancer than others, according to Correa's data.

But the LSU Medical Center researcher said he needed to further study the relationship between lung cancer and living close to Baton Rouge industries before he can make any statement on that subject.

"Many things about living near plants in Baton Rouge are being explored at the moment," Correa said, including a very complicated computer analysis.

"The problem with studying industries in Baton Rouge is that they are clustered," he said.

An earlier study of lung cancer death certificates by Dr. Marise Gottlieb indicated an increased risk of lung cancer for persons living within one mile of a Louisiana chemical plant.

Gottlieb agreed in an interview that cigarette smoking is the major cause of lung cancer, but said the hazards of occupational exposure and air pollution cannot be dismissed.

Even if they represent a small percentage of lung cancer cases on a national level, there is a possibility that they may be a significant factor in certain areas, she said.

While air pollution, occupational hazards and other factors play a part in lung cancer, these problems should not be allowed to take the emphasis off of tobacco in the fight against the disease, British researcher Richard Teto told the convention.

We must not, in looking at air pollution, forget that cigarette smoking is a much greater hazard," he said.

Some of the thousands of new chemicals being produced are likely to cause cancer, he said. But the deadliness of tobacco must be stressed to the public, he said.

Of every 1,000 young men in Great Britain who smoke, one will be murdered, six will die in traffic accidents and 250 will be killed by tobacco, he said.

In the United States those figures need to be modified, because higher percentages will be murdered and killed on the highways, but still a much larger number will be killed by cigarette smoking, Teto said.