

**CITY OF BALTIMORE**

SHEILA DIXON, Mayor



**HEALTH DEPARTMENT**

Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein, Commissioner  
210 Guilford Avenue  
Baltimore, MD 21202

***FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE***

***CONTACT: Ingrid Antonio***

***PHONE: 443-984-2623***

***[Ingrid.Antonio@baltimorecity.gov](mailto:Ingrid.Antonio@baltimorecity.gov)***

**Swann Park Task Force Sends Letter to Mayor Dixon**

October 1, 2007 -- The Swann Park Task Force sent a letter to Mayor Sheila Dixon today reviewing research conducted by a Johns Hopkins School of Public Health research team at Swann Park in the 1970s, which found high levels of arsenic in the park's soil.

Based on this review, the Task Force is urging better cooperation between policymakers, communities, and researchers in Baltimore today.

The letter is part of a broad review of the history of Swann Park, where high arsenic levels led to the closure of the park earlier this spring. The Task Force is charged with learning the lessons of the past to prevent problems in the future. Its work is independent of the efforts by federal officials to assess the human health impact and the plans by the city and company to remediate the site.

In the 1970s and early 1980s, the Hopkins research, led by Dr. Genevieve Matanoski, was shared with the Environmental Protection Agency, published in the scientific literature, presented at a scientific conference, and known to state environmental health officials. Some of the results (although not the soil testing) were reported in the local media.

However, city officials and community leaders were apparently not aware of the findings. The study did not lead to environmental review or policy changes at the time. Thirty years later, the discovery of old documents led state officials to order new testing of the site, which found the arsenic contamination.

“Had the results of the Swann Park research been more widely known when they were published,” the Task Force wrote Mayor Dixon, “more attention probably would have been paid to the site decades before 2007.”

At the recommendation of the Task Force, Baltimore City Health Commissioner Dr. Joshua M. Sharfstein is working with area research institutions to develop a system to notify the Health Department of important public health research with implications for individual communities in Baltimore or Baltimore as a whole. The Health Department is starting a monthly meeting with researchers to present their research to staff and guests.

“It’s a two-way street,” said Dr. Sharfstein. “Researchers should actively engage the communities affected by their research, and public officials and community leaders should seek out results.”

“I encourage all Hopkins faculty members and students to share information about Baltimore with city and state officials and relevant communities,” said Dr. Michael Klag, Dean of the Bloomberg School of Public Health. “Because the point of public health research is to have a real impact, it is important that those who can make policy changes are made aware of the results.”

Dean Klag will share information on how to provide updates on research to the Health Department with the faculty at the School of Public Health.

“Coordination with communities and public officials is an essential part of good research,” said Dr. Allan Noonan, Dean of the School of Community Health and Policy at Morgan State University. “I welcome improved coordination with the Health Department, policymakers, and communities.”

The letter is the second communication from the Swann Park Task Force to the Mayor. In July, the Task Force reviewed historical documents related to arsenic contamination at Swann Park. The Task Force continues to meet and is expected to present additional recommendations to the Mayor later this fall.

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