

Key case against IBM over cancer deaths of workers underway

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SAN JOSE, Calif. (AP) — Lawyers suing IBM Corp. hope a "corporate mortality file" maintained by the technology company will bolster their claim that IBM knew its electronics-making workers suffered high rates of cancer, the San Jose Mercury News recently reported.

A medical expert hired by former IBM employees has reviewed the records, which tracks 30,000 employee deaths from 1969 to 2000.

The first court hearing in a Silicon Valley cancer cluster lawsuit against IBM began last week. IBM will ask a Santa Clara County judge to dismiss the case before it goes to trial, which is expected to begin next month.

The plaintiffs allege that the high number of cancer deaths among IBM employees are linked to chemicals used to make computer chips at a factory in San Jose.

IBM Defense

IBM contends there is no scientific evidence to support that claim.

IBM has also argued that it is protected by the state's workers compensation law which restricts suits by injured workers.

The review by Richard Clapp, a Boston University epidemiologist, found that IBM workers died of certain cancers at younger ages and higher rates than the general population. It also found the company knew about the higher cancer rates for decades, the Mercury News reported.

IBM spokesman Bill Hughes told The Associated Press that the company maintained the file in order to track benefit payments. Hughes disputed Clapp's claim that the company should have spotted worrisome patterns in it.

"It's impossible to draw any conclusions about rates of cancer from this file," Hughes said. "Mr. Clapp's assertion is phony science and not supported by the information in the file."

Plaintiffs' attorney Richard Alexander said his team obtained the file after IBM failed to mark it confidential and mistakenly handed it over. Hughes called that claim "absurd" and "purposely misleading," and said the document was willingly turned over several years ago.

The San Jose lawsuit, filed by four former Silicon Valley employees and their families, is the first of several cases filed against IBM by former chip workers and company scientists. □