

Submission  
No 11

## FORMER URANIUM SMELTER SITE, HUNTER'S HILL

Name: Mrs Joan Conlan

Date received: 29/06/2008

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Mr Ian Cohen  
Chair  
Legislative Council  
General Purpose Standing Committee No 5  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Mrs Joan Conlan

29 June 2008

Attention: Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No 5

**RE: Inquiry into the former uranium smelter site in Hunter's Hill.**

My husband, Gerald and I were the owner/occupiers of 9 Nelson Parade prior to it being sold to the Health Department in 1978. I ask that you note the following as part of the inquiry into the former uranium smelter site in Hunter's Hill.

In 1956, we purchased a property named "Radium" at 5 Nelson Parade (later renumbered as 9) which was tenanted. We gained possession in 1962 and moved into a very run down dwelling; a two bedroom cottage with a large back yard adjoining the waterfront on Parramatta River.

Gerald undertook his own "site remediation" to turn our backyard into a usable lawn covered series of terraces. He frequently had to unblock the septic tank shared by both our house and that occupied by Lorraine and Victor Kongats. Together, these took endless hours and were carried out in what we now know to be toxic soil.

In 1963, we leased from the Maritime Services Board, a strip of reclaimed land at the foot of our property on Parramatta River. This had been the actual site of the smelter known as Radium Hill Company from 1910 to 1916. We were not aware of this throughout the lease.

In 1965, the Department of Public Health informed us of the presence of uranium in the soil and extensive generally low levels of contamination of four properties, one of which was ours. Limited investigations were carried out and a letter dated 3 November 1965 from the Department of Public Health told us that "the health hazard is at present negligible", (refer Attachment A).

In 1972, Gerald was diagnosed with Chronic Lymphatic Leukaemia (CLL). CLL is a type of cancer that affects the blood and bone marrow. According to [www.leukaemia.org.au](http://www.leukaemia.org.au) the cause of this is unknown, but it is thought to result from damage to one or more of the genes that normally controls blood cell development.

More tests were carried out in Nelson Parade in 1977 and we were advised in a letter of 23 August 1977 from the Minister for Health, Kevin Stewart, "radioactivity does not affect your house and there are no plans to demolish it, however, there is an area of activity in your backyard and it is the view of the Health Commission that soils from the contaminated area should be removed to some remote site where it will present no hazard", (refer Attachment B).

In 1978, the Maritime Services Board ordered the termination of our waterfront lease, the reason being, "the Health Commission of NSW which requires free access to the foreshore land to enable it to carry out the decontamination operation of the affected Nelson Parade properties", (refer Attachment C) and refers to how by our declining to do so we would be delaying the decontamination process.

We dearly loved living in this street and the area in general; lovely neighbours, a quiet dead end street perfect for raising our two children and of course, wonderful waterfront views. Many, many hours of labour were put into restoring the house to a liveable condition by both Gerald and myself.

Maintaining the property with Gerald's illness became difficult and subsisting on an invalid pension with a young dependent child was taking a toll financially. In 1978 we decided to sell our property and in September that year it was purchased by the Health Department for the sum of approximately \$75,000. We wished to purchase a 3 bedroom home within Hunters Hill, however, realistically we could not afford this and moved two suburbs west, to Ryde.

In 1987, Gerald died of Chronic Lymphatic Leukaemia related symptoms.

Contrary to a previous statement by the Health Minister, the house was demolished in the early 1990's.

Thirty years on I'm not aware of any decontamination operation.

To this end, I hope that the health of those living in Nelson Parade is placed well above and beyond any monetary gains to be made by any party. I believe it is time for open and honest transactions and communications from all interested people.

It is a fact that radon is a cancer causing, radioactive gas but these are not the only contaminants in the affected soil in Nelson Parade - I believe there may also be lead and arsenic. I sincerely wish that if the Government proceeds with any remediation of the sites affected that the soil is thoroughly tested without doubt to be safe for removal so that all involved in the process and the surrounding sites remain safe from any toxins related to current contaminants. Too many people have perhaps suffered unnecessary side affects already.

I ask that my address be kept confidential.

Sincerely

Joan Conlan

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH

Sc 8242



DIVISION OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH  
86-88 GEORGE STREET Nth.  
SYDNEY

When replying please quote HMW:ST

Mr. G. H. Conlan,  
5 Nelson Parade,  
HUNTER'S HILL, N.S.W.

3rd November, 1965.

Dear Sir,

Recently, the attention of this Branch was drawn to the presence of uranium in the soil of four lots in Nelson Parade, Hunter's Hill, one of which is yours.

It appears that a company known as the Radium Hill Company, N.L., occupied the site from about 1910 to 1916, during which time radium was extracted from several hundred tons of uranium ore. In those days, the possibility of a health hazard from radioactive substances was not fully appreciated, and it is evident that extensive, but generally low-level, contamination of the area has occurred. It is also probable that waste material from the processing has been dumped in certain places.

Officers of this Branch have carried out a limited investigation, which indicates that the health hazard is at present negligible, but that areas of relatively high activity should be investigated further, and any potential hazard eliminated by removal of the radioactive soil. It is considered that this material may be in pockets and buried up to a foot below the present surface.

We would like your concurrence that we obtain a number of soil samples from your lot. These will consist of cores about 8 inches diameter and a foot long, and they will be analysed for radioactivity. They will enable us to assess the position more accurately, and to make appropriate recommendations. It is our desire to take such remedial action as will avoid a departmental declaration of some of these lots as unhealthy building land under Section 55 of the Public Health Act, a course that would obviously depress the value of all allotments in the area.

We will contact you further at an early date. In the meantime, if you wish to discuss the matter, please do not hesitate to telephone either Mr. R. J. Bayliss or the undersigned.

Yours sincerely,

H. M. WHAITTE,  
Officer-in-Charge,  
Radiation Branch.

ATTACHMENT A



C.957

Sydney

23 August 1977

Dear Mr. Conlan,

I refer to your letter of 2 August 1977 regarding radioactive contamination in your area and your wish to sell your property.

~~The radioactivity does not affect your house, and there are no plans by the Government to seek to demolish it. However, there is an area of radioactivity in your backyard, and it is the view of the Health Commission that soil from the contaminated area should be removed to some remote site where it will present no hazard. Before seeking to arrange this, however, the New South Wales Government is discussing with the Commonwealth Government the possibility of financial assistance to cover the cost entailed.~~

I sympathise with you in the disturbance this has caused you, and hope that I can give you some more definite information soon.

Yours sincerely,

Minister for Health

Mr. G. Conlan,  
9 Nelson Parade,  
HUNTERS HILL. 2110.

ATTACHMENT B

HEALTH SERVICES BOARD OF N.S.W.

CIRCULAR QUAY WEST,  
SYDNEY.

Mr. G.H. & Mrs. J.P. Conlan,

9 Nelson Parade,

HUNTERS HILL.

2110.

TELEPHONE No. 8 0305  
(24 Hours) **OD**  
OFFICE HOURS 9.30am - 4.30pm  
Apply for Communications to  
the Secretary  
Box 88, S.H.S.  
Sydney, N.S.W.  
Please Quote  
75/1244  
IM.

For oral enquiries ask for  
Mr. Miles. Tel: 2402 323.

30 MAR 1978

Dear Sir & Madam,

Re: Lease of premises at Parramatta  
River, Hunters Hill.

I am instructed to advise that the Board requires the termination of your existing lease and accordingly requests that the Deed of Surrender enclosed herewith be executed and returned to me as soon as possible. This action has been initiated at the request of the Health Commission of New South Wales which requires free access to the foreshore land to enable it to carry out the decontamination operation of the affected Nelson Parade properties.

I would further advise that in the event of your declining to execute and return the Deed of Surrender within one month of the date hereof, the Board will take appropriate action to terminate the lease at the end of the current year of tenancy i.e., 30th June, 1978. However, this alternative course of action could delay the decontamination operation due to the further time which may elapse and your co-operation in returning the Deed duly executed with the stipulated time would be greatly appreciated.

Yours faithfully,

*G. F. Alldis*  
G. F. ALLDIS,  
Solicitor for the Board.

Enc.

ATTACHMENT C