



National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health Information Summary

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NIOSH Feasibility Assessment for a Cancer Study Among Former IBM Employees Who Worked at the Endicott, New York Plant

What is a feasibility assessment?

A “feasibility assessment” is a review of records to figure out if there is enough information available to conduct a valid health study.

Why was the feasibility assessment done?

The New York State Department of Health and Congressional representatives from New York asked the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) for help in dealing with concerns about the health of current and former IBM employees in Endicott. Representatives of NIOSH, a part of CDC, first met with several former IBM employees and members of the community to hear their concerns. The feasibility assessment was a first step in addressing a concern of some former employees – that they may be more likely to get cancer than other people due to their contact with chemicals at the Endicott plant.

What information is needed for a cancer study?

- Employee records to identify former employees
- Work records to figure out when and for how long employees worked
- Several years of data because cancers take many years to develop
- Information about the chemicals that were used at the plant, if available, to help figure out if working with these chemicals could cause cancer
- The more information that we have, the more sure we can be that the results that we find are correct

How was the feasibility assessment done?

NIOSH representatives first met with IBM staff to learn about the Endicott plant and the available employee records and other records, such as the results of air samples tested for chemicals. NIOSH representatives then requested, received, and evaluated computer records for former IBM employees at Endicott. In addition, some air sampling records were examined at the IBM offices in Somers, NY. Records were reviewed for the years 1965 through 2002, when Endicott Interconnect Technology bought the Microelectronics Division of the Endicott plant from IBM.

How was the feasibility assessment done?

To figure out if a study can be done, NIOSH asked the following types of questions:

1. Can we figure out, from the records, who worked at the Endicott plant?
2. Can we figure out which former employees had cancer?
3. Do the employee records provide enough information to know when and where employees worked at the plant?
4. What information is available on chemicals in the plant that employees may have breathed in or got on their skin?
5. Can the chemical information be linked to work records to figure out how much contact with chemicals each employee may have had?
6. Is there information in the company records on factors outside of work that could lead to cancer?
7. If a study was done, would we have enough information to be sure that the results are correct?

What did we decide?

We decided that there is enough information to do a study that will tell us if former IBM employees at Endicott are more likely to get cancer than other people.

If a study is done, what kind of study would we suggest?

NIOSH suggests a study to:

1. Figure out if employees are more or less likely than other people to get cancer
2. Figure out if former employees with contact to chemicals at work, or who worked in certain departments in the plant, are more or less likely than other people to get cancer

What would be needed to do this type of study?

This type of study would cost about \$3.1 million. IBM would also have to help by giving the records that would be needed to the researchers doing the study.

If an increase in cancer is found, how sure can we be that the cancers were due to work?

We may not be certain that cancers are due to work because:

1. We may not be able to get information from the records on things outside of work that may cause cancer, such as smoking.
2. There is not a lot of information about the chemicals used, or which employees may have come into contact with chemicals, or how much contact the employees may have had with chemicals.

If it is found that cancer is higher among employees than other people, would more study help decide if the cancers were due to work?

A follow-up study could be done to help decide if the cancers were due to work. In such a study, former employees, or their closest relatives, could be contacted to get more information about their work at the Endicott plant and factors outside of work, such as smoking.

Will NIOSH do a cancer study?

We believe that doing a study is important to address the community concerns. We are committed to being involved in the study if the needed records and money can be obtained.

How can I get a copy of the report?

You can get a copy of the report by writing NIOSH Publications, 4676 Columbia Parkway, MS C-13, Cincinnati, OH 45226, e-mailing NIOSH Publications at pubstaf@cdc.gov, or faxing 1-513-533-8573. You can also call the NIOSH 800 number at 1-800-35-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).

The report is also available on the internet at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/review/public/103/>.

How do I give comments on the report?

Comments can be submitted using an on-line form at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/review/public/103/>. Comments can also be mailed to the NIOSH Docket Office, 4676 Columbia Parkway, MS C-34, Cincinnati, Ohio 45226, submitted by fax at 1-513-533-8285 or e-mailed to niocindocket@cdc.gov. *Please reference docket number NIOSH-103 on your comments.*
