

[MUSIC PLAYING]

CATHY WURZER: An East Metro manufacturer with a history of pollution issues is facing dozens of civil lawsuits over its use of an industrial solvent linked to cancer. WCCO TV was the first to report that Water Gremlin, which makes fishing sinkers and lead battery parts in White Bear Township, was served Tuesday with 95 lawsuits alleging that the company's unsafe release of TCE caused cancer, other chronic illnesses, and 35 wrongful deaths. The company was fined by the state for its TCE emissions back in 2019, and the chemical is now banned in Minnesota.

Joining me now for more and all, this is WCCO reporter Jennifer Mayerle. Jennifer, welcome.

JENNIFER MAYERLE: Thank you for having me on.

CATHY WURZER: The plaintiffs are folks who live or used to live near the Water Gremlin plant in White Bear Township. Give us a sense of the health problems some of them are living with.

JENNIFER MAYERLE: These are all people who still currently live near Water Gremlin or lived there at some time. And the health impacts really range. Most of the impacts health conditions are cancer. You have Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, bladder cancer, a number of different kinds, multiple myeloma, skin cancers, and some other rare and aggressive cancers.

Then yesterday, we told a story of a woman named Shelly Tripp, who has chronic lung disease, who had was diagnosed with hypersensitivity pneumonitis. And that led to scarring and damage on her lungs, where now she is on oxygen full time. So there's a wide range of health conditions that people feel, and these lawsuits allege were caused by the TCE exposure from Water Gremlin.

CATHY WURZER: Can they prove Water Gremlin is behind their health issues?

JENNIFER MAYERLE: I mean, the lawsuits allege that Water Gremlin's actions and release excessive and unsafe levels of TCE into the air for a number of years caused these health conditions that made these people sick. There's an attorney who is representing these folks that says he has the evidence of the release, the exposure, and different things that all add up to suing Water Gremlin. They believe they can make the case.

CATHY WURZER: What does he say about why he's filing all of these lawsuits individually and not as a class action suit?

JENNIFER MAYERLE: Sure. He's in every single one of these people is an individual. They have individual health concerns. They have individual exposure. They were exposed for different lengths of time. And because they all have different things going on with their health, they're suing them all individually, which is pretty powerful that there's 95 individual lawsuits here.

CATHY WURZER: And what do the plaintiffs want from Water Gremlin?

**JENNIFER
MAYERLE:**

The biggest thing that they want is accountability. When I first started talking with them nearly four years ago, I went to a community meeting, and they heard the same information I was hearing about this TCE exposure and what the possibilities were.

And they started telling me about, could my cancer be connected to this TCE exposure? For so many years, I wondered, why did I get this cancer? Why me? Why is it happening? I don't think I was exposed to anything in the environment.

And now, they hope that this will provide some answers and that Water Gremlin will step up, and what they hope is do the right thing in their mind, and take accountability for that excessive release of TCE, and what they believe is their actions making them sick.

**CATHY
WURZER:**

And what's the company saying about all of this?

**JENNIFER
MAYERLE:**

So the company got back to us and said that they-- when we talked with them on Tuesday, when these lawsuits were served, they said they had just received a complaints that morning, that they are taking a close look at all of them, and basically said their-- went on to say that nearly half of Minnesotans will be diagnosed with cancer in their lifetime, and that they feel badly for people who are going through these conditions.

We have their full statement on our website WCCO.com. But beyond that, we did request a comment from them yesterday again if they wanted to update it now if they had some time to look at them, and we've not heard another comment from them.

**CATHY
WURZER:**

All right. A story to be continued, obviously. Jennifer, good reporting. Thank you so much.

**JENNIFER
MAYERLE:**

Thank you, Cathy.

**CATHY
WURZER:**

WCCO TV reporter, Jennifer Mayerle.