

Unknown waters

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Special to QMI Agency

"Cancer can be beaten."

For decades that's been the battle cry for the war against cancer. But a growing body of scientific evidence says that the biggest weapon we have in the fight against the disease is prevention. And the very best way to fuel that weapon is to eliminate pollutants in our environment that have been directly linked to a host of cancers.

"We know that the cancer epidemic is being fueled by carcinogens in our air, water and food," said Liz Armstrong, co-author of *Cancer: 101 Solutions to a Preventable Epidemic*.

Many of these carcinogens are found in common items that we use every day in our homes, schools and businesses. For example, certain pesticides have been linked to lymphomas, leukemia, and prostate, lung, breast and ovarian cancer. Polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, or PAHs, are found in everything from car and truck exhaust to second-hand smoke, and have

been linked to lung, skin, bladder, kidney and other cancers. Formaldehyde, commonly used in pressed wood furniture and a variety of other products, has a causal link to lymphatic cancers and brain tumors.

Identifying and eliminating these known carcinogens from our environment can help prevent cancers even before they start.

According to General Cancer Statistics 2010, The Canadian Cancer Society's annual report released last month, "At least 50 per cent of cancers can be prevented through healthy living and policies that promote healthy environments."

This is echoed by the U.S. National Cancer Institute's President's Cancer Panel Annual Report, also released in May, that states, "Research suggests that at least half of all new cancer cases and cancer deaths worldwide are preventable."

"From the right to know and the duty to inquire follows the obligation to act," said Sandra Steingraber, cancer survivor, scientist and author of *Living*

Downstream. She believes that cancer prevention is possible by abolishing known carcinogens.

"The public story of cancer is actually a very hopeful one," Steingraber said. "Each person is a data point. The story tells us that the environment plays a much bigger role than we previously thought. The hope is that we can do something about it."

Carcinogens cause mutations in DNA, which ultimately can lead to cancer. An estimated two-thirds of all cancers that are caused by environmental carcinogens could be eliminated.

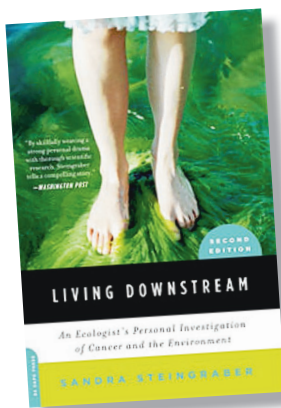
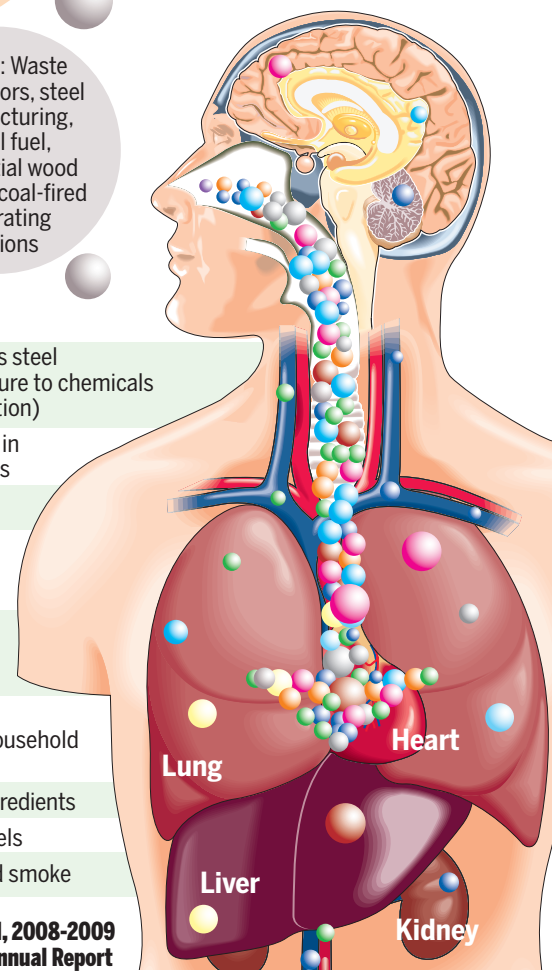
"If the science showed us that the disease is mostly driven by genes, then I would feel depressed," Steingraber said. "In reality, only 5% of all cancers are triggered by genetic factors."

"We can't change our ancestry, but we can change our systems of agriculture and industry so that they are not dependent on toxic chemicals," she said. "We can prevent cancer by protecting people from what causes cancer."

What you can do

- ▶ Filter tap water
- ▶ Store or carry water in stainless steel containers (this reduces exposure to chemicals while reducing plastics production)
- ▶ Microwave food and beverages in ceramic (not plastic) containers
- ▶ Don't use pesticides
- ▶ Buy food grown without pesticides, fertilizers or growth hormones
- ▶ Reduce red meat consumption and avoid processed meat products
- ▶ Properly dispose of used pharmaceuticals, paints and household chemicals
- ▶ Buy products with non-toxic ingredients
- ▶ Check your home for radon levels
- ▶ Avoid exposure to second-hand smoke

Source: President's Cancer Panel, 2008-2009 Annual Report



Living downstream

Sandra Steingraber's book, *Living Downstream: An Ecologist Looks at Cancer* (1997) was recently transferred to the big screen by Canadian director Chandra Chevannes. The book's second edition, *Living Downstream — An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment* (Da

Capo Press, 2010), was released in April to coincide with the release of the *Living Downstream* documentary.

For more information about the *Living Downstream* documentary, books or Steingraber's ongoing work, visit livingdownstream.com



Sandra Steingraber (left) and Chandra Chevannes.

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