MARK ZANATAN, one of the children living in the Love Canal area of Niagara Falls, N.Y., waves a banner at a recent neighborhood protest meeting. The neighborhood is built over a filled-in chemical dump, and now it is believed the chemicals are endangering the health and lives of residents.

Toxic specter shadows families that must flee stench of Love Canal

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. (AP) — Terrence and Joanne McCartney are haunted by a specter that shadows all the families living in their Love Canal home: Are the chemical vapors that poisoned their home poisoning their bodies?

"If something's wrong with my child, I don't know what I'd do," said McCartney, a bearded, 25-year-old construction worker who grew up in the Love Canal area. "I can see the area and may have caused a high level of miscarriages among the young women residents and birth defects that have affected some children.

The Toxics were dumped into an abandoned canal 30 years ago by the Hooker Chemical Co. In 1952, Hooker filled the ditch and covered it with a clay lid. The land was deeded to the school board, which built an elementary school, sold some parcels and turned over some to the city.

In the years since, the chemicals seeped out. Today, the choking stench of their vapors permeates the neighborhood and fills the cellars of the houses that were built nearby.

As President of President, Bruce Davis says the clay vault method of sealing the dump was "the accepted practice" at the time.

"It may be a while before these problems start to show, but this has been going on for many years," he said. "This was common practice in the past structure of chemicals for many years, and I doubt that anyone was as careful as we were.

On orders from the state, 31 families with infants or pregnant women are evacuating their Love Canal homes. The state will now find the moving bill, board up the trim, white-chip board homes and pay them $200 monthly for at least six months.

Gor. Hugh Carey has asked President Carter to declare a Love Canal disaster area. Federal Disaster Administration officials toured the area Saturday but declined to say what they would recommend.

A bill is before Congress to provide $3 million in aid to Love Canal. The city was preparing to borrow up to $3.5 million to drain and accrete the poisonous toxins.

In addition, the state health department plans studies to determine the chances that the McCartneys and their neighbors will one day contract cancer and learn more about the areas of their ailments — like the skin eruptions that have plagued 13-year-old Karen Schroeder since she was a kid playing along the canal.

"It will take time to learn the level of cancer and the risk," said Dr. Roger Breslow, state director of public health. "These studies are going to take a long time.

A number of the 200 families living near the canal paid between $12,500 and $14,000 for their homes. They say the property now is worthless.

Mrs. Schroeder, who is raising four children in the area, said, "What I want to know is this: When my kids grow up and they do — are they going to be able to get married and have children?"