



Lawmakers: 13 Air Force bases had tainted water

By Kimberly Johnson - Staff writer

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Congressional lawmakers who examined extensive drinking water contamination from the 1960s through the 1980s at Camp Lejeune, N.C., now say the problem extends, in varying degrees, to 22 other bases — more than half of them current or former Air Force installations.

In 1980, military officials at Lejeune discovered the presence of trichloroethylene, a volatile organic compound used by the military and civilian businesses, such as dry cleaners, said Rep. Bart Stupak, D-Mich., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce oversight and investigations subcommittee. As a result, 10 wells at the base were eventually shut down by 1987 after their TCE contamination was found to be a staggering 1,400 parts per billion, well above the government maximum level of 5 ppb.

“TCE is the most widespread water contaminant in the nation, and almost every major military base has a Superfund site with TCE contamination,” Stupak said.

At least 850 former residents of the base have filed administrative claims, seeking nearly \$4 billion, for exposure to the industrial solvents.

The Navy Judge Advocate General’s office promised lawmakers it will “thoroughly analyze each and every claim utilizing the best scientific research available,” The Associated Press reported.

Citing a list of 22 military bases with contaminated groundwater compiled by the Department of Health and Human Services’ Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Stupak pressed the agency in a June 6 letter to give lawmakers more information on just how much exposure military personnel have received over the years.

The Air Force installations included in the list are below. Click on the link(s) for specific information about water contamination problems at each base:

- * [Air Force Plant No. 4 \(General Dynamics\), Fort Worth, Texas;](#)
- * [Andersen Air Force Base, Yigo, Guam;](#)
- * [Fairchild Air Force Base \(four waste areas\), Spokane, Wash.;](#)
- * [March Air Reserve Base, Riverside, Calif.;](#)
- * [Mather Air Force Base, Mather, Calif.;](#)
- * [McChord Air Force Base, Tacoma, Wash.;](#)
- * [McClellan Air Force Base, Calif.;](#)
- * [Middletown Air Field, Middletown, Pa.;](#)
- * [Norton Air Force Base, San Bernardino, Calif.;](#)
- * [Old Roosevelt Field, Garden City, N.Y.,](#) and [2nd Roosevelt Web site;](#)
- * [Otis Air National Guard Base/Camp Edward, Falmouth, Mass.;](#)
- * [Pease Air National Guard Base, Portsmouth/Newington, N.H.;](#)
- * [Wurtsmith Air Force Base, Oscoda, Mich.,](#) and [2nd Wurtsmith Web site.](#)

The agency has compiled detailed reports on the history of the base contaminations and offers recommendations, such as strategies for monitoring pollutants and the need for public awareness campaigns to inform affected residents. The agency, however, acts as an adviser and has no regulatory power.

Groundwater contamination at or near military bases is widespread, and far surpasses the ATSDR list of 22, said one environmental watchdog group.

“Camp Lejeune is a microcosm of what’s happening all over this nation,” said Doris Bradshaw, board chairwoman for the environmental watchdog group Military Toxics Project, based in Lewiston, Maine. “I feel for that community because there are hundreds of communities dealing with this same issue.”

At-risk bases are older and use groundwater as a water supply, Bradshaw said.

“If it has groundwater, nine out of 10 times, it will have contamination,” especially if it was built before World War II, she said. “There were no guidelines for how to dispose of certain types of items. They would just dig a hole and throw them in.”

Toxic culprits include munitions, solvents and what Bradshaw called a “toxic soup,” or dumping “everything from A to Z” into the ground.

“People are sick around these sites,” she said. “It doesn’t just stop on the site. You can’t contain water. It’s impossible to contain.”

“These sites need to be dug up all over America,” Bradshaw said.

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