

# MILITARY TOXIC POLLUTION



## A Threat to Public Health & the Environment

The U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) is our country's largest polluter, responsible for over 29,000 toxic hot spots on 11,000 active and former military properties with a cleanup price tag in the billions of dollars. [DERP] Our military produces more hazardous waste every year than the five largest U.S. chemical companies combined. [D&S] Yet, the DOD has demanded Congress grant them sweeping exemptions from a myriad of hazardous waste, cleanup, and wildlife protection laws. The Pentagon has claimed that the exemptions are necessary to protect military readiness, even though scientists and environmental and wildlife officials have testified that the exemptions are unnecessary and harmful, and DOD and other government studies have shown that environmental laws are not inhibiting military training. If Congress grants the exemptions, it would open up millions of acres of military lands and waters across our country to a new onslaught of unregulated and unbridled pollution.

■ Military pollution poisoned the only source of drinking water for half a million people on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, and has forced the shutdown of drinking water wells in many other communities. Just one of the chemicals found in military munitions—perchlorate—has contaminated drinking water wells and public water systems in at least 18 states. [EWG]

■ Clusters of childhood leukemia have been documented near military bases in Fallon, Nevada and Sierra Vista, Arizona. Military pollution has been linked to increased risk of lung cancer for women living near the Massachusetts Military Reservation on Cape Cod, to low birth weights for babies born near Tinker Air Force Base in Oklahoma, and to serious health problems in dozens of other communities. [MTP]

■ At the Badger Army Ammunition Plant in Wisconsin, the Army is breaking signed cleanup agreements and asking Congress to let them off the hook for cleaning up over a decade of toxic dumping which contaminated drinking water wells with cancer-causing chemicals in excess of federal health standards.

**BE SAFE: Take Precautionary Action To Protect  
Our Health From Military Toxic Pollution**

# BE SAFE's FOUR PRINCIPLES

## 1. HEED EARLY WARNING SIGNS

There is a strong and growing case for immediate action to prevent communities surrounding military bases—as well as civilian and military personnel—from being exposed to toxic and hazardous substances.

- Open air burning of military munitions has been linked to increases in lung cancer in residents living near the Massachusetts Military Reservation. During the 1980s, women living near the base were 64% more likely to be diagnosed with lung cancer than elsewhere in the state. [BU & Feigenbaum]
- PCBs and pesticides have been found in the blood of Indigenous Yu'pik people who live and gather food near a former military base on Saint Lawrence Island, Alaska at levels 6 to 10 times above the national average. [ACAT]
- From 1940 to May 2003, the U.S. Navy used three-quarters of the Puerto Rican island of Vieques for bombardment and munitions disposal. Heavy metals and other military toxins have been found in water and vegetables in civilian areas. From 1985 to 1989, Vieques children aged 0-9 were 117% more likely to contract cancer than children of the same age on the main island of Puerto Rico. Vieques residents as a whole are 73% more likely to suffer from heart disease and 64% more likely to develop hypertension. [AFSC]

## 2. PUT SAFETY FIRST

The military causes preventable exposures to toxic chemicals each day across our nation as a result of existing legal exemptions, unsafe practices, failure to implement simple pollution prevention practices, and an attitude of being “above the law.”

More and more communities endangered by military pollution are demanding accountability and protection. This has prompted the DOD to seek additional permanent exemptions from environmental and human health laws for broad categories of military activities, including all training and related operations. The message to communities is clear that in the name of national security, the DOD does not care what impact their operations have on the health of Americans. The DOD's attitude of operating above the laws that other polluters are held to is not acceptable within a democratic society. Our military exists to protect our communities, not to harm them from within.

## 3. EXERCISE DEMOCRACY

One of the founding principles of our democracy is that all Americans are equal under the law—the same laws apply to everyone. But for the past two years, the Pentagon has asked Congress to exempt our military from most federal public health and environmental laws—claiming that these laws threaten military readiness—a rationale they have failed to substantiate time and again. These exemptions would apply to millions of acres of military lands and waters across the country where hazardous waste, cleanup, and wildlife protection laws would no longer be upheld in the name of national security. If these exemptions go through, the homeland security of people and wildlife living near military bases would be compromised for years to come. Allowing unregulated toxic pollution in our communities would undo many years of hard-won progress to hold the DOD accountable for past decades of toxic pollution. We must act now to oppose special exemptions for the military and send the message that our government should be bound by the same laws as the rest of us.

BE SAFE is coordinated by the Center for Health, Environment & Justice. Contact us at CHEJ, P.O. Box 6806, Falls Church, VA 22040, 703-237-2249, or 518-732-4538, or visit [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com)

## 4. CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTIONS

### ■ Investigate Military Pollution in Your Area.

To find out more about toxic pollution at active or former military sites in your area, go to [www.miltoxproj.org](http://www.miltoxproj.org), <http://www.dtic.mil/envirodod/>, or [www.scorecard.org](http://www.scorecard.org).

### ■ Oppose Military Exemptions.

Contact the national Military Toxics Project (MTP) at [www.miltoxproj.org](http://www.miltoxproj.org) or (207) 783-5091, [mtp@miltoxproj.org](mailto:mtp@miltoxproj.org), P.O. Box 558, Lewiston, ME, 04243.

### ■ Join the Healthy Communities Campaign.

MTP's Healthy Communities Campaign works to improve legislation and enforcement of environmental laws and document health impacts. To find out more, visit [www.miltoxproj.org](http://www.miltoxproj.org).

### ■ BE SAFE.

Take precautionary action to prevent military pollution and prevent further harm. Sign on to the BE SAFE Platform on the next page. Be counted when we deliver this national Platform to the White House in 2005. Endorse the BE SAFE Platform today at [www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com)

### ■ Your Vote Counts.

The next election will set the country's course on military pollution policies. For information on environmental voting records, contact [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org) and [www.lcv.org](http://www.lcv.org). To register to vote, contact [www.earthday.net](http://www.earthday.net)

## AIR FORCE BASE LINKED TO HEALTH PROBLEMS Community Organizing Wins Health Clinic & Federal Support

*"My children started getting sick. I kept thinking 'There must be something wrong here,' because my children were healthy and their bones were bowing."*

*Yolanda Johnson, San Antonio, TX*

Yolanda Johnson has lived one block from Kelly Air Force Base in San Antonio for over thirty-five years. Her children played a few feet away from where Air Force personnel dumped toxic waste into an open pit. When it rained, the pit would overflow into the neighborhood. Plumes of toxic contamination ran over four miles and under 20,000 homes in areas that are 85% Mexican-American. Residents drank water from this shallow aquifer and used it to water lawns and gardens. Community health surveys conducted by residents found patterns of illnesses including nervous system breakdown, and liver, kidney, and bone problems. Ninety-one percent of adults and 79% of children in Yolanda Johnson's North Kelly Gardens neighborhood suffer from multiple chronic illnesses.

The Committee for Environmental Justice Action organized the local community affected by toxic dumping at Kelly Air Force Base. As a result, contaminated drinking water wells were abandoned and funding was obtained for a health clinic to treat residents exposed to poisons from the base. Recently, the base was selected as a federal Environmental Justice Demonstration Project site. Much work remains to be done: contamination under the homes needs to be remediated and polluting private industries now occupy the base. Step-by-step, the community is succeeding in seeking environmental justice to restore the neighborhood and help people whose health has been impacted by decades of military pollution.

## References:

U.S. Department of Defense, Defense Environmental Restoration Program [DERP], *Annual Report to Congress FY 2002*; Dollars and Sense [D&S], *War on the Earth*, March/April 2003; Environmental Working Group [EWG], *Rocket Science*, July 2001; Military Toxics Project [MTP], *The Human Cost of Military Toxics*, June 2002; Boston University School of Public Health [BU], *Executive Summary: Upper Cape Cancer Incidence Study*, September 1991; Joel Feigenbaum [Feigenbaum], *Remarks on Upper Cape Lung Cancer Elevations*, March 1997; Alaska Community Action on Toxics [ACAT], *Elevated Levels of Harmful PCB's Found in People of Saint Lawrence Island, Attributed to Exposure to Military Site*, October 2002; and American Friends Service Committee [AFSC], *Talking Points on Vieques*, June 2001.

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# ***BE SAFE Platform***

*In the 21st century, we envision a world in which our food, water and air are clean, and our children grow up healthy and thrive. Everyone needs a protected, safe community and workplace, and natural environment to enjoy. We can make this world vision a reality. The tools we bring to this work are prevention, safety, responsibility and democracy.*

*Our goal is to prevent pollution and environmental destruction before it happens. We support this precautionary approach because it is preventive medicine for our environment and health. It makes sense to:*

- *Prevent pollution and make polluters, not taxpayers, pay and assume responsibility for the damage they cause;*
- *Protect our children from chemical and radioactive exposures to avoid illness and suffering;*
- *Promote use of safe, renewable, non-toxic technologies;*
- *Provide a natural environment we can all enjoy with clean air, swimmable, fishable water and stewardship for our national forests.*

*We choose a “better safe than sorry” approach motivated by caution and prevention.  
We endorse the common-sense approach outlined in the BE SAFE’s four principles listed below.*

## ***Platform Principles***

### **HEED EARLY WARNINGS**

Government and industry have a duty to prevent harm, when there is credible evidence that harm is occurring or is likely to occur—even when the exact nature and full magnitude of harm is not yet proven.

### **PUT SAFETY FIRST**

Industry and government have a responsibility to thoroughly study the potential for harm from a new chemical or technology before it is used—rather than assume it is harmless until proven otherwise. We need to ensure it is safe now, or we will be sorry later. Research on impacts to workers and the public needs to be confirmed by independent third parties.

### **EXERCISE DEMOCRACY**

Precautionary decisions place the highest priority on protecting health and the environment, and help develop cleaner technologies and industries with effective safeguards and enforcement. Government and industry decisions should be based on meaningful citizen input and mutual respect (the golden rule), with the highest regard for those whose health may be affected and for our irreplaceable natural resources—not for those with financial interests. Uncompromised science should inform public policy.

### **CHOOSE THE SAFEST SOLUTION**

Decision-making by government, industry and individuals must include an evaluation of alternatives, and the choice of the safest, technically feasible solutions. We support innovation and promotion of technologies and solutions that create a healthy environment and economy, and protect our natural resources.

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**Take precautionary action to prevent military pollution.  
Sign onto the BE SAFE Platform.**

Be counted when we deliver this national platform to the White House in 2005. Endorse the platform today at **[www.besafenet.com](http://www.besafenet.com)**

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