

Testimony

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Good morning, my name is Jerry Ensminger and I served my country faithfully for more than 24 years in the United States Marine Corps. I would like to thank the chairman, the committee members and their staffs for all of the hard work that went into making these hearings possible. I must say that since 3 January 2007, I have been heartened and inspired by the over-sight activities of this congress. You have been taking on the important issues that matter to the majority of our citizens, not just the issues that affect/benefit special interest groups and big business!

I am appearing here today as a tragic example of the consequences of a system that ignores our environment and the inevitable health effects that result from it. Marine Corps Base, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina is quite possibly one of, if not the worst drinking water contamination incidents in modern world history! The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) estimates that between 750,000 and 1,000,000 people were potentially exposed to horrendous levels of toxins through their drinking water while stationed at Camp Lejeune.

My daughter Janey was conceived while her mother and I lived in one of the base family housing areas where the drinking water was affected by the contamination at the base. Just like our other children, Janey was born seemingly normal, that is until she was diagnosed with Acute Lymphocytic Leukemia (A.L.L.) at the age of six. In 1997, the ATSDR proposed a childhood leukemia/non-Hodgkins lymphoma study for Camp Lejeune children who had been exposed to Volatile Organic Chemicals (V.O.C.'s, cleaning solvents!) in utero while their parents lived at the base between the years of 1968-1985. (Note: The start date of this study was based upon the beginning date for the computerization of birth records in North Carolina, not on potential exposure.)

The protocol/proposal for this study outlined that that the expected occurrences of the targeted illnesses in a cohort of 10,000-12,000 births for that time period would be 7.2 cases. The ATSDR has confirmed 14 cases of leukemia and 2 cases of non-Hodgkins lymphoma, this more than a 100% increase in the incidence of these childhood cancers!

Mr. Chairman, let me layout some of the facts and figures relating to the Camp

Lejeune water contamination situation. The documented levels of contaminants in the finished drinking water (at the tap) were some 280 times higher than what is currently considered safe for these very same chemicals! The Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery issued strict regulations (BUMED INST 6240.3B) in 1963 governing potable water distribution systems on Naval Shore Facilities. Included in these regulations were pre-emptive measures to ensure that existing and future water supplies were not contaminated by extraneous sources. The Camp Lejeune, Tarawa Terrace family housing area water supply wells were located on the virtual property line, down gradient, and directly across the street from multiple potential civilian contamination sources! (Gasoline stations, auto repair facilities, dry cleaning establishments, and known septic systems) In 1971, the Naval Facilities Engineering Command from Norfolk, Va. came to Camp Lejeune and selected multiple sites for the construction of new drinking water supply wells for the base. One of these new wells was HP-651 which began producing raw water for the Camp Lejeune, Hadnot Point water distribution plant in January of 1972. The site which had been selected by the Navy engineers for the placement of HP-651 was at the back corner of the base disposal yard! (junk yard!) The disposal yard had been in operation for decades by the time this site was selected for a drinking water supply well. In February 1985, HP-651 tested positive for some 28,000 ppb of Volatile Organic Chemicals! There is little doubt that this water supply well was contaminated immediately upon, or very shortly after its construction! The irony of all this is the fact that many of the human exposures that took place at Camp Lejeune would have been avoided had Navy and Marine Corps officials followed their own regulations! The most audacious and blasphemous truths to this entire water contamination incident at Camp Lejeune is the fact that Navy and Marine Corps officials knew of the existence of this contamination in the drinking water for 5 years before they took any action to rectify the problem! That is correct, all of this was known and taking place behind the scenes at the very same time that my daughter Janey was suffering through her fight with leukemia and they said absolutely nothing! Not only did they say nothing, they went as far as to return 2 of the 3 known contaminated wells for the Tarawa Terrace housing area back on-line for 2 more years! They had the option of tapping into the local community water lines which were located just a few feet from the property line. Instead, Navy and Marine Corps officials opted against this idea because they didn't want to owe any reciprocating favors to the local community government!

Since the ATSDR entered the gates of Camp Lejeune to execute their congressionally mandated mission, representatives of the Department of the

Navy (DoN) have done all they could to obstruct their efforts. I can make this statement with confidence because I possess the documentation to back it up! As recently as the week before last, DoD and DoN officials were threatening to thwart the ATSDR's initiatives at Camp Lejeune by withholding funding!

It is a known fact that the United States Department of Defense is our nation's largest polluter. It is beyond my comprehension why an entity with that type of reputation and who has a vested interest in seeing little to no environmental over-sight would be included in the scientific process. Not only are they (DoD) obstructing science, they are also jeopardizing the public health for millions of people all around the world. It is quite obvious by their activities to thwart science that they have something to fear. What they fear is their past negligence and the liability that comes along with it! There is little wonder why the DoD has been seeking immunities from environmental regulations for the last 7 years and yet this administration and past congress' have allowed their (DoD's) tentacles to infiltrate the realm of science. We all need to allow science to speak for itself and let the chips fall where they may!