

Toxic Trash Contamination on US Military Bases

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Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Environment](#)

America's military is the world's greatest polluter. Especially in war theaters. During conflicts. Long after they end. Notably in Iraq and Afghanistan. Toxic wastelands and then some. Large areas unsafe for human habitation. Military operations generate hundreds of thousands of tons of toxic waste. Dangerous carcinogens. Including depleted uranium, heavy metals, hazardous chemicals, plastics, solvents, asbestos, pesticides, petroleum fuels, fungi, and bacteria. Poisoning air, water and soil. Affecting local populations and US forces. Causing virtually every imaginable health problem. Many longterm. Debilitating. Others potentially fatal. Including cancer, heart disease, diabetes, gastrointestinal ailments, kidney and liver diseases, respiratory, skin and other infections, asthma, immune system suppression, ulcers, birth defects, severe headaches, emotional distress, pulmonary problems, sexual dysfunction and chronic diarrhea.

Open-air burn pits as large as 10 acres bear much responsibility. Used to incinerate trash. Notably in Iraq and Afghanistan. State-of-the-art incinerators when used release heavy metals, unburned toxic chemicals and entirely new ones during incineration. Hundreds. Potentially thousands. Many unidentified. Many more toxic than original waste burned. Remaining longterm. Some producing virtual permanent contamination. Once released, traveling vast distances. Via air and water currents. Producing global contaminants.

Affecting food and water ingested. Air inhaled. According to EPA data:

“Fugitive emissions and accidental spills may release as much or even more toxic material into the environment than direct emissions from incomplete waste incineration.”

Explosions and fires release toxins. Some potentially catastrophic. A US air force fact sheet says:

“Burning solid wastes in an open pit generates numerous pollutants. These pollutants include dioxins, particulate matter, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, volatile organic compounds, carbon monoxide, hexachlorobenzene, and ash.”

“Highly toxic dioxins, produced in small amounts in almost all burning processes, can be produced in elevated levels with increased combustion of plastic waste (such as discarded drinking water bottles) and if the combustion is not at high incinerator temperatures.”

“Inefficient combustion of medical or latrine wastes can emit disease-laden aerosols.”

In October 2008, the US [Military Times](#) headlined “Report: Army making toxic mess in war zones,” saying:

A Rand Corp. report shows “cases of hazardous waste dumped in ditches, soldiers setting up tents on top of fuel spills and service members exposed to cyanide gas during overseas deployments.”

DOD “has no overarching policy to ensure environmental mishaps in Iraq and Afghanistan don’t harm troops’ health, create political disputes and avoid costly clean-up efforts when it’s time to leave those countries.”

“If not properly addressed in planning or operations, environmental considerations can make it more difficult for the Army to sustain the mission - yet environmental considerations are not well incorporated into Army planning or operations in any phase of an operation.”

The report titled “Green Warriors: Army Environmental Considerations for Contingency Operations from Planning through Post-Conflict,” states:

DOD contractors dump waste oil in Iraq landfills. Then sold the barrels.

US soldiers in Afghanistan buried drums containing unidentified liquids. Later discovered to be hazardous. Contaminating soil and groundwater.

An Iraq airfield has leaking fuel tanks.”Major health issues arise whenever it is necessary to dig.”

Iraq commanders set up hazardous waste disposal areas close to camp perimeters.

High-grade diesel fuel was spilled into an Iraq lake. Used for base drinking water.

US Iraq forces improperly dumped insecticides, batteries, oil products and other hazardous materials.

Iraq troops became ill after rolling leaking drums of industrial-strength pesticides out of a building.

In August 2010, [New York Times](#) correspondent James Risen discussed problems from burn pit toxic waste exposure.

Former staff sgt. Susan Clifford one of many victims. Involved in dumping Balad Air Base trash “into a massive, open-air pit.”

“Every conceivable type...” Including “plastics, batteries, appliances, medicine, dead animals, even human body parts...”

Burned “with a dousing of jet fuel. A huge black plume of smoke hung over the pit, nearly blinding Ms. Clifford on her twice-a-month visits, and wafted over the entire base.”

Clifford was a serious runner. In 2005, she began coughing up phlegm. Had breathing problems. Had difficulty working out. Couldn’t physically train. Her symptoms worsened.

Became serious. Doctors discovered her lungs filled with fluids. Unlike what they ever saw before. Unsure what to do. In April 2010, Clifford retired from army service with full disability.

“(O)ne of the first veterans to receive an official ruling from the military that exposure to open-air burn pits at American bases in Iraq and Afghanistan have caused medical problems,” said Risen.

Numerous others affected the same way. Pentagon officials downplay the problem to this day.

At the time, Force Health Protection and Readiness Program deputy director, Dr. Michael Kilpatrick, saying:

“(N)o medical data...indicate(s) any specific illness or illnesses have been caused by exposure to burn-pit smoke.”

As recently as summer 2014, Veterans Affairs officials claim no evidence showing burn pit toxins cause longterm health problems.

Truth is polar opposite. Pulmonary expert Dr. Robert Miller treated dozens of soldiers home from Iraq. He found a pattern of unusual respiratory and pulmonary disease.

Linked to burn pit exposure, he believed. A huge problem, he said. Soldiers know more about it than physicians.

He’s called from “all over the country.” Returning soldiers and vets needing help.

Sciencecorps calls itself

“an informal network of health professionals who work on environmental and occupational health issues, relying on the fields of toxicology, epidemiology, medicine, and other technical areas.”

Conducting “hazard and community evaluations...Involved “in research and policy development.”

“(W)orking to strengthen public health protections and awareness through outreach and education.”

Studying “health hazards of chemicals commonly used on military bases.” Saying toxic exposure among US personnel is “well-established.”

Evidence of toxic contamination is indisputable. Human effects are devastating.

“The enemy you know is far less dangerous than the one you don’t know,” said Sciencecorps. DOD operates irresponsibly.

Letting US personnel handle dangerous toxins. Without warning of potential hazards. Or providing adequate protective gear.

Most US bases at home and abroad are contaminated. Exposure causes diseases, disability, and cross-generational damage. To veterans and families.

Large open-air burn pits produce toxic clouds of chemicals. Created during incineration.

Exposure (even small amounts) causes potential harm to every body organ. Initiating a chain of biological events. Showing up sooner or later.

According to Sciencecorps, health problems depend “on a range of individual characteristics.”

Including “timing of exposure, whether exposure occurs through inhalation, ingestion, or skin exposure, and individual susceptibility.”

“Individual susceptibility is determined by genetic differences, previous and current health conditions, past and ongoing exposures to other chemicals and risk factors, diet, lifestyle, age, gender, and other personal variables.”

Most veterans know little about toxin exposure. Proving chemical causation isn't easy. Getting VA help depends on it.

Many hazardous chemicals are genotoxic. Damaging genetic material in cells. Causing mutations. Dictating how bodies function.

Whether cancer or other diseases may develop. Usually long after military personnel leave service. Making it harder to get VA benefits.

When entering service, US military personnel have no idea what's coming. War zone enemies are less dangerous than environmental contaminants.

Future illnesses and diseases way outnumbering battlefield casualties. The hidden cost of war.

Affecting hundreds of thousands of service personnel and vets. Local populations.

The price for advancing America's imperium. Monied interests alone benefit.

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