

STATEMENT OF

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TO

THE HOUSE ENERGY AND COMMERCE COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND INVESTIGATIONS

ON
CAMP LEJEUNE DRINKING WATER

JUNE 12, 2007

Chairman Stupak, Congressman Whitfield, distinguished Members of the Subcommittee; thank you for the opportunity to appear before you and participate in this hearing regarding past contamination of two of Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune's drinking water systems. We are here today because the health and welfare of our Marines and their families remains a top priority. We continue to support and fully cooperate with the Agency for Toxic Substance and Disease Registry to determine if contaminated water aboard our installation harmed Marines and our families.

In 1982 and 1983, two of Camp Lejeune's eight public drinking water systems were determined to be contaminated by two chemicals – trichloroethylene (TCE) and perchlorethylene (PCE; also known as tetrachloroethylene) – commonly found in degreasing agents and dry cleaning solvents. At the time, no environmental standards or regulations in regards to the use and disposal of TCE or PCE were in place. In fact, initial regulation of these volatile organic compounds under the Safe Drinking Water Act began in 1987 and 1991 respectively.

Volatile Organic Compounds were first discovered in the Camp Lejeune drinking water in 1980, while a Navy contractor was conducting tests for trihalomethanes. It was determined that an interference chemical was present in the water at the treatment plant and tap; however, the type of chemical or source was unknown. Base personnel continued to sample the water over the next several years, utilizing various laboratories; sampling results varied, calling into question the validity of the tests. In 1982, TCE and PCE were determined to be the interference chemicals, and in late 1984, the groundwater was determined to be the source. As data on individual wells was received, impacted wells were removed from service. In total, 10 drinking water wells aboard the installation were immediately removed from service. Subsequent investigation by the State of North Carolina revealed leaks from an off-base drycleaner had contaminated the wells near the Tarawa Terrace housing area, while on-base sources contributed to contamination of the Hadnot Point water system.

This unfortunate situation happened over 20 years ago and while there are still large gaps of knowledge on potential health implications due to exposure to TCE or PCE today, these gaps were even greater back in the 1980's. What the Nation accepted as environmental standards and regulations 20 years ago has drastically changed as a result of scientific knowledge and awareness.

Camp Lejeune has been investigated by the Environmental Protection Agency's Criminal Investigation Division and the General Accountability Office. Both investigating agencies reported that Camp Lejeune's response to the contamination was appropriate at that time and consistent with existing environmental standards and regulations. Additionally, the Commandant of the Marine Corps chartered his own expert panel to look at past activities which also concluded appropriate actions were taken based on the guidance and information provided by federal agencies.

We have relied on the expertise of ATSDR to determine whether or not the past contaminated water on our installation harmed our Marines and their families. Although we are not part of the design or implementation of the ATSDR survey or study, we remain committed and fully support their efforts. Full access to personnel, infrastructure, installations and requested documentation was granted to ATSDR from the start and will be available for the duration of their study. Additionally, we act as a liaison with federal and state agencies to ensure ATSDR obtains all resources necessary to move forward with their work, ultimately bringing us one step closer to an answer.

In order to educate and communicate with family members and Marines that may have been exposed to the contaminated water, a robust communications campaign was initiated to encourage participation in the ATSDR survey. An official website regarding the Camp Lejeune Water was developed with frequently asked questions, maps, press releases and advisories, as well as contact numbers and links for additional information. This website is currently in the process of being updated.

To help better understand public exposure to TCE and PCE from drinking water and any potential health effects, the Marine Corps is funding a new effort by the National Academy of Sciences to conduct a comprehensive review and evaluation of all medical and scientific information available on the link between TCE/PCE exposure via drinking water and adverse health effects.

Ultimately, everyone is here today for the same reason: to determine whether or not our Marines and their families were harmed in any way by contaminated water. We fully comply with environmental laws and regulations and we remain committed to working with ATSDR and other federal agencies involved with the study. We must all rely on the experts for the answers.

We are pleased to answer any questions you may have.