

Reducing Environmental Cancer

NCI – Presidential Cancer Panel

2008-2009 Report

Released April 2010

See: Chapter 5 Exposure to Contaminants and Other Hazards from Military Sources

Summary: “...The military is a major source of toxic occupational and environmental exposures that can increase cancer risk. Information is available about some military activities that have directly or indirectly exposed military and civilian personnel to carcinogens and contaminated soil and water in numerous locations in the United States and abroad. However, we may never know the full extent of environmental contamination from military sources. Nearly 900 Superfund sites are abandoned military facilities or facilities that produced materials and products for or otherwise supported military needs. Some of these sites and the areas surrounding them became heavily contaminated due to improper storage and disposal of known or suspected carcinogens including solvents, machining oils, metalworking fluids, and metals. In some cases, these contaminants have spread far beyond their points of origin because they have been transported by wind currents or have leached into drinking water supplies.

Hundreds of thousands of military personnel and civilians in the United States received significant radiation doses as a result of their participation in nuclear weapons testing and supporting occupations and industries, including nuclear fuel and weapons production, and uranium mining, milling, and ore transport. Hundreds of thousands more were irradiated at levels sufficient to cause cancer and other diseases. These populations include the families of military and civilian workers, and people—known as “downwinders”—living or working in communities surrounding or downstream from testing and related activities, and in relatively distant areas to which nuclear fallout or other radioactive material spread. Federal responses to the plight of affected individuals have been unsatisfactory. Those affected lack knowledge about the extent of their exposure or potential health problems they may face. Similarly, most health care providers are not aware of cancer and other latent radiation effects and therefore are unlikely to adequately monitor patients for these health conditions. Exposure to ionizing radiation related to nuclear weapons testing is an underappreciated issue worldwide...”