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In 2008, I received a memo from an Air Force bioenvironmental flight commander, Lt. Col. Darrin Curtis, saying that the troops at Air Base Balad were being exposed to “an acute health hazard.”

At that point, no one had reported on the burn pits, which were used by the military and its contractors to dispose of trash at almost every base in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Reporters figured everyone could see them—flames from Balad’s pit rose so high pilots used it as a landmark—so they must be OK.

But the troops were worried. Commanders feared for their own health. And nobody wanted to see the dog who wandered the base with amputated body parts in his mouth that he had dug out of the burn pit.

At Balad, fire consumed 240 tons of trash in an open pit every day. Black smoke billowed across the base. Tinier bases had tinier pits, but those pits burned everything from Styrofoam to old computers to unexploded ordnance.

I talked to hundreds of people who believed they were sick from the burn pits. Airmen who had been stationed a mile up the road from Balad’s pit returned with respiratory diseases, immune-system issues and cancer. One hopeful young combat vet died within weeks of my conversation with her.

The reporting led to Congressional hearings, a ban on burn pits and a burn pit registry. But it’s not enough.

Recently, the Supreme Court found that lawsuits against the American contractor that operated the burn pits, KBR, could move forward. KBR had argued that it couldn’t be sued because it had operated the burn pits for the government. The Court issued no statement, but the lawsuits will go back to trial courts.

This brings me hope for all of our veterans—not just those involved in this case.

I figure there’s money to be made on those class-action suits, and, therefore, money will finally be poured into trying to ascertain what troops were exposed to, as well as the effects of those exposures. That means veterans could ultimately get the benefits and

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health care they've earned, rather than the run-around I've heard about for seven years as vets try to get help.

Hopefully, there will be more interest in respiratory ailments, neurological disorders, cancers, and cardiovascular issues we've watched skyrocket—according to the Defense Department's own records—as service members have deployed.

This is a new hope. As a journalist, first for *Military Times* and then for *USA TODAY*, I've paid close attention to how one out of four of the people who deployed in 1991 became sick, but were initially told it was psychological. I've read the studies about Agent Orange, and seen vets fight for decades for benefits that seem obvious.

And, as the burn-pit story has played out, I've watched as the Defense Department and the Department of Veterans Affairs quashed research, downplayed outside reports and set up as legitimate their own studies that were ultimately ridiculed by national research organizations, yet still listed as good information for the troops.

I've kept track of 13 years' worth of military morbidity reports. Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease increased steadily from a rate of 98 cases per 10,000 in 2001 to 218 per 10,000 in 2009, before going back down to 147 in 2013. About 92 percent of COPD cases are diagnosed in people older than 45, according to the American Lung Association—not in healthy service members, only 9 percent of whom are older than 41. Chronic sinusitis increased from a rate of 71 in 2001, to 245 in 2009. Cardiovascular symptoms increased from 224 in 2001 to 280 in 2009. Tumors increased from 91 in 2001 to 205 in 2009. Symptoms of neurologic conditions increased from 70 in 2001 to 252 in 2009.

The suits say KBR's actions resulted in illnesses and death. That seems like an obvious assumption: In the United States, we are not allowed to burn trash in large open pits because it's a health hazard.

I talked to Bob Miller, a pulmonologist at Vanderbilt University Medical Center in 2010 who performed biopsies on the lungs of dozens of service members. Troops with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne at Fort Campbell had returned from their deployment unable to run fast

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enough to pass their physical-fitness tests, but their pulmonary function tests came back normal and chest X-rays showed nothing.

But the biopsies showed that more than 50 of these guys had constrictive bronchiolitis, a rare disease that blocks the smallest passageways of the lungs. The military stopped sending their soldiers to Miller, causing concern that sick troops could not prove there was anything wrong, either to gain access to treatment or for benefits.

Anthony Szema, a second doctor who works for the Northport VA Medical Center, determined that service members who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan had higher rates of asthma than did troops who didn't deploy. About 11 percent of service members have respiratory symptoms, he said.

But VA's burn pit website states, "At this time, research does not show evidence of long-term health problems."

# Cancer: the Price of Peace?

January 13, 2009 by Luanne Bradley

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Once home, many of our soldiers who served in Iraq have to battle chronic rashes, tumors and even cancer.

The **Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA)** is demanding to know why. Why did the giant contractor KBR knowingly expose our forces to carcinogenic toxins at its power plants in Iraq?

**KBR**, the largest non-union construction company in the United States, has struck gold in its massive contracts with the U.S. government, raking in \$17 billion in Iraq-related work since 2003.

The former Halliburton subsidiary has relied on both military and non-military personnel to protect its workers, including 16 Indiana Guardsmen who are now suing the defense contractor, accusing the company of being aware it was exposing them to cancer-causing chemicals. The Guardsmen, who suffered a myriad of health problems since coming home (one died from lung cancer), claim KBR managers “downplayed and disregarded” the risk from contamination at their site. KBR denies any wrongdoing.

“The situation...may just be the tip of the iceberg,” observes IAVA Executive Director Paul Rieckhoff. His nonpartisan agency wants Congress to take action and request the contractor to testify about its knowledge of toxic exposure.

Meantime, Indiana Senator Evan Bayh has vowed to reintroduce legislation to create a medical registry for military personnel exposed to toxins. It would track service members

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exposed during wartime service and guarantee them access to priority care at VA hospitals. Bayh says the registry is modeled after our government's response to Agent Orange during the Vietnam conflict. Veterans suffering can cut through the red tape and get the treatment they need.

IAVA has been lobbying for such a registry. "This latest example of toxic exposure underlines the urgency," says Rieckhoff, who founded this first organization of Iraq and Afghanistan vets in 2004 and now boasts more than 125,000 veteran and civilian supporters.

Image: [Army.mil](#)

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## Iraq & Afghanistan Burn Pit Chemical Exposure Cancer & Disease Claims

August 03, 2017 10:00 AM



Breathing dust, fumes, and other toxic substances from burn pits, exposed troops deployed overseas, and those who worked for government contractors abroad and other civilians, to a serious hazard. Some of the chemicals were very toxic carcinogens and deadly.

At US Senate hearings it was revealed that the toxic carcinogen, Sodium Dichromate (CAS 10588-01-9), was spread across a ruined water-injection facility in Qarmat Ali, Iraq, when the soldiers were there in the spring and summer of 2003. Thousands of individuals may have been exposed.

A simple evaluation may assist in assessing your exposure and disease which includes: a history which characterized the exposure and preexisting medical conditions of each individual exposed; a physical exam that identified any findings potentially related to a chromium exposure, and medical tests including blood, urine, chest X-ray, and a breathing test (called a pulmonary function test).

An exposure to this chemical may produce:

- ◆ Allergy-like symptoms
- ◆ Asthma
- ◆ Breathing restrictions
- ◆ Cancers (lung, brain, bone, skin)
- ◆ Chronic bronchitis
- ◆ Chronic coughs
- ◆ Chronic respiratory infections
- ◆ Constant Infections
- ◆ Cramps and severe abdominal pain
- ◆ Diarrhea
- ◆ Emotional Distress
- ◆ Gastrointestinal illness and distress
- ◆ Leukemia
- ◆ Long term shortness of breath
- ◆ Lung Cancer
- ◆ Nose Bleeds
- ◆ Pulmonary injuries
- ◆ Reactive Airway Disease
- ◆ Restrictive Airways Disease (Bronchiolitis)
- ◆ Serious heart conditions
- ◆ Severe Headache
- ◆ Skin infection
- ◆ Sleep apnea
- ◆ Throat Infections
- ◆ Ulcers
- ◆ Unexpected weight loss
- ◆ Vomiting

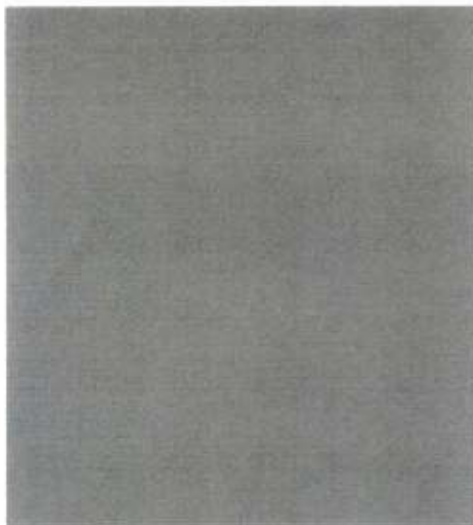
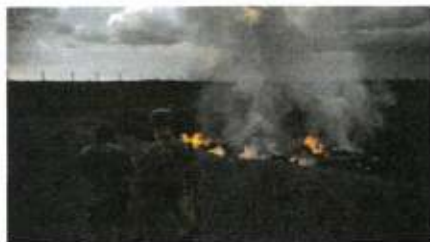
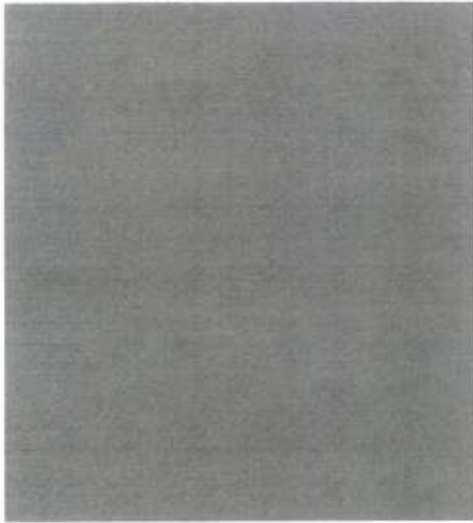


▶ Weeping lesions on extremities

As a supporter for the improved health and welfare of individuals against hazardous occupational and environmental exposures, [Jon L. Gelman](#) advocates for changes in safety standards and safer use of chemicals. If you have been exposed to burn pit dust, smoke or fumes or [Sodium Dichromate](#), contact Jon Gelman via e-mail [jon@gelmans.com](mailto:jon@gelmans.com) or [Click here to submit new claim information](#).

The following is a list of locations where burn pits allegedly operated:

Exposure Site	Site City	Site State/Province	Site Country
Bagram Airfield	Bagram	Parvan	Afghanistan
Camp Bastion	Lashkar Gah	Helmand	Afghanistan
Camp Dwyer	Garmsir	Helmand	Afghanistan
Camp Eggers	Kabul	Kabul	Afghanistan
Camp Kabul	Kabul	Kabul	Afghanistan
Camp Phoenix	Kabul	Kabul	Afghanistan
Camp Spann	Mazar-e Sharif	Balkh	Afghanistan
COP Bak	Bak	Khowst	Afghanistan
COP Tere Zayi	Tere Zayi	Khowst	Afghanistan
FOB Airborne	Kane-Ezzat	Vardak	Afghanistan
FOB Asadabad	Asadabad	Konar	Afghanistan
FOB Chapman	Khost	Khowst	Afghanistan
FOB Ghazni	Ghazni City	Ghazni	Afghanistan
FOB Maimaneh	Maimaneh	Faryab	Afghanistan
FOB Orgun-E	Orgune	Paktika	Afghanistan
FOB Qalat	Qalat	Zabul	Afghanistan
FOB Ramrod	Malwand	Kandahar	Afghanistan
FOB Salerno	Khowst	Khowst	Afghanistan
FOB Shank	Gardez	Lowgar	Afghanistan
FOB Sharana	Sharana	Paktika	Afghanistan
FOB Shindand	Sabzawar	Herat	Afghanistan
FOB Tarin Kowt	Tarin Kowt	Uruzgan	Afghanistan
FOB Walton	Kandahar	Kandahar	Afghanistan
ISAF HQ	Kabul	Kabul	Afghanistan
Kandahar Airfield	Kandahar	Kandahar	Afghanistan
FOB Fenty	Jalalabad	Nangarhar	Afghanistan
Camp Lemonier	Djibouti	DJ	Djibouti
Al Asad Airbase	Al Asad	Al-Anbar	Iraq
Al Taqaddrum Airbase	Al Habbaniyah	Al-Anbar	Iraq
Ali Air Base	Nasiniyah	Dhi-Qar	Iraq
Baghdad Central Prison	Abu Ghraib	Baghdad	Iraq
Cam Scania` Nippur	Nippur	Al-Quadisyyah	Iraq
Camp Anderson	Al Diwaniyah	Al-Quadisyyah	Iraq
Camp Ashram	Ashraf	Diyela	Iraq
Camp Babylon	Al Hillah	Babil	Iraq
Camp Baharla	Fallujah	An-Anbar	Iraq
Camp Bucca	Umm Qasr	Al-Basrah	Iraq
Camp Corregidor	Ramadi	Al-Anbar	Iraq
Camp Delta	Al Kut	Wasit	Iraq



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