



UNITED STATES CENTRAL COMMAND  
OFFICE OF THE COMMANDER  
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MACDILL AIR FORCE BASE, FLORIDA 32671-5101

4 December 2008

The Honorable Russell D. Feingold  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510-4904

Dear Senator Feingold:

Thank you for your recent letter regarding the possible exposure of service members and the local population to hazardous waste in Iraq and Afghanistan. The health of our personnel and environmental management of our forward deployed locations is one of my top priorities.

Since 2003, deployed environmental health experts in the CENTCOM AOR have collected thousands of air, water and soil samples for scientific analysis in an effort to characterize deployment sites and potential exposure levels to ensure our personnel and local Iraqis are protected. Regarding the alleged high toxin levels at Balad Air Base, the December 2007 summary of the joint health risk assessment was based on reporting the raw data in nanograms instead of picograms. This caused the final result of that assessment to be reported at a value 1000 times higher than the actual value. After correction, the Defense Health Board concluded that there were no dioxin-associated significant short or long term health risks or, elevated cancer risks anticipated among the personnel deployed to Balad. As part of the ongoing occupational and environmental health surveillance program, a second comprehensive study of the air quality at Joint Base Balad was conducted and the results will be published soon and help guide recommendations for the frequency and extent of future air quality monitoring.

Regarding your concern over documenting exposure in individual medical records, we continue to monitor respiratory related medical visits to the Joint Base Balad Air Force medical clinic which remain consistently low for 2008 when compared to other Air Force medical units in theater. In accordance with Department of Defense and Joint Staff instructions, occupational and environmental health monitoring data and associated health risks based on sampling data are currently documented and any exposure to personnel that could result in short or long term health risks are placed into the medical record. We are actively engaged with other organizations within DoD, to develop a Periodic Occupational Environmental Monitoring Summary that more accurately documents identified acute and chronic health risks for populations at deployed locations. In conjunction with the Joint Staff and other agencies will continue to collect air, water and soil samples for scientific analysis in an effort to monitor potential exposure levels to our personnel and local Iraqis.

Regarding your concern over the number of incinerators, there are currently 17 solid waste, 2 hazardous waste and 24 medical waste incinerators operational in Iraq with another 23 solid waste incinerators under construction. Construction completion dates for the remaining incinerators range from January through December 2009. Additionally, 13 solid waste (6 on hand) and 9 medical waste incinerators are in the acquisition process.

There is and will continue to be a need for burn pits during contingency operations. To this extent, much effort has gone into locating/relocating pits in remote areas of the operating bases to minimize exposure, training personnel on proper operation, developing/circulating operating procedures and assessing burn pit operations to include corrective action.

Our military leaders in Afghanistan are in the process of designing treatment/disposal facilities for solid waste. The current leadership in Afghanistan approved 11 additional environmental positions to assist in developing/improving and managing these programs. Additionally, I am establishing an environmental program team to include representatives from Installation Management Command, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and Combined Joint Task Force - 101 to help identify and resolve environmental issues from operations in Afghanistan.

Thank you for your interest in this issue and for your continued support of the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines of U.S. Central Command.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Dave Petraeus".

DAVID H. PETRAEUS  
General, U.S. Army