

EPA Rules Lejeune Water Contaminant Causes Cancer

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[HOPE HODGE - DAILY NEWS STAFF](#)

A long-anticipated report by the Environmental Protection Agency determined this week that exposure to the chemical degreaser TCE causes cancer in humans. In the Camp Lejeune community, this means that those who lived and worked on base between the 1950s and 1980s, when solvents including TCE contaminated the water supply, may have finally proved what was making them sick.

The report, released Thursday, found that exposure to TCE, short for trichloroethylene, is convincingly linked to kidney cancer, non-Hodgkin lymphoma and liver cancer, with more limited evidence that it causes bladder, esophageal, prostate, cervical, and breast cancers, as well as childhood leukemia.

According to the findings, all routes of exposure can be carcinogenic to humans.

For a large cluster of male breast cancer survivors who all have Camp Lejeune in common, the information vindicates the belief that they were poisoned by the base water.

Tallahassee, Fla., resident Mike Partain, who survived male breast cancer nearly four decades after his birth aboard Camp Lejeune, said the cluster now has 71 members.

“This is confirmation of what we’ve known all along,” Partain said.

Partain said the report also serves to further discredit a 2009 finding from the National Research Council, often cited by Marine officials and public affairs materials, finding no clear connection between the base water and latent disease.

Jerry Ensminger, a local water contamination victims’ advocate who lost a daughter to childhood leukemia in 1985, said he was heartened by the report.

“This was 20-plus years in the making,” he said. “It’s a crying shame that it takes that long for our regulatory agencies to finally getting around to protecting public health and the environment.”

Contamination victims and their advocates hope the EPA findings will assist in the passage of the Senate Caring for Camp Lejeune Veterans Act, which would provide hospital and nursing home care and medical services to those affected by the water. The bill has nine co-sponsors; its companion bill in the House, the Janey Ensminger Act, has 23.

In a statement released by the bill's sponsor, Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., Burr said the new information is vital for veterans of Camp Lejeune.

“This designation, which raises questions about the National Academy of Science’s 2009 review of TCE and PCE at Camp Lejeune that the Navy and Marine Corps have cited in their literature to the affected community, is of the utmost significance as it will further inform veterans and their family members, who may have contracted various forms of cancer as a result of exposure to this chemical, of the risk associated with it,” he said. “I am hopeful additional awareness will spur them get the medical assessment and treatment they need.”

A spokeswoman for the Environmental Working Group, LeeAnn Brown, said the group was pleased by the EPA’s move to classify TCE, though it was a long time coming.

“I think that we do know that there has been strong lobbying efforts from the chemical industry and other industries that use trichloroethylene.” she said. “I think for them they see it as a concern from just a public relations standpoint.”

Marine Corps Spokeswoman Capt. Kendra Hardesty said the Corps was aware of the report.

“We are reviewing the recently published report that is substantially similar to the draft report we have previously seen, and we will update our information and materials accordingly,” she said.

Three-quarters of a million people may have been exposed to contaminated water while aboard Camp Lejeune.

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<http://www.jdnews.com/articles/cancer-95715-lejeune-exposure.html>