

Fort Ord Leave Behind

Poisoned in service to our country, hundreds who served on Fort Ord Army base are facing cancers and serious illnesses after exposure to extensive contamination with potential carcinogens. Sadly in good company, many are suffering from rare blood cancers and other medical conditions in a pattern recognized as related to the water contamination at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. But unlike Lejeune, and despite the identification of many of the same contaminants of concern found at Lejeune, those who lived and worked at Fort Ord are unfairly being denied healthcare and VA benefits.

Online groups have identified 399 individuals suffering from cancers and other conditions that may be related to the Fort Ord contamination, including many otherwise healthy individuals who were diagnosed at atypical ages without a relevant family history or other known toxic exposures to explain their diagnoses.¹ Sadly, this has included 161 people who lived at or worked on Fort Ord with blood cancers including cases of Multiple Myeloma (MM), leukemia, and lymphoma. We have identified 64 people diagnosed with MM alone. A rare diagnosis, Multiple Myeloma typically represents less than 2% of cancers. Roughly half of those suffering from myeloma who served at Fort Ord are already dead. Many of the cases were Veterans who were diagnosed in their 40s or 50s—despite the average age at diagnosis for Multiple Myeloma being around 68. We have also identified many impacted dependents who lived on base as well as civilians who worked on base suffering from severe illnesses.

Fort Ord was declared an EPA Superfund site in 1990 citing both contamination in the soil and in the groundwater, including aquifers that have served as the drinking water source for those living on base.² The site was added to the National Priority List by the EPA and EPA reports show approximately 45 different contaminants of concern in the air, soil, and water at Fort Ord.³ Roughly one third of the contaminants of concern found at Fort Ord are probable or known carcinogens. Of note, even though Ord was declared a Superfund site in 1990, service members and families continued to live on the base and drink the water for years AFTER it was identified as heavily contaminated and WITHOUT being notified or warned about the contamination.

Looking at Multiple Myeloma alone, peer-reviewed research from the National Institute of Health and the EPA have positively linked myeloma to five of the chemicals found in the Fort Ord groundwater, including Benzene⁴, Tetrachloroethylene or perchloroethylene (PCE)⁵, Dichloroethane⁶, Methylene chloride or Dichloromethane (DCM)⁷, and Trichloroethylene (TCE)⁸. Comparing these contaminants to those found at Lejeune, the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) has recognized Multiple Myeloma and 15 other cancers and diseases as linked by epidemiological evidence to either TCE or PCE which were primary contaminants in the drinking water at Lejeune.⁹

With the passage of the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012, qualifying Veterans who served at least 30 days on active duty at Camp Lejeune can receive all their healthcare through the VA. In addition, for Veterans with one of the 15

conditions presumed to be related to exposure to the contaminated drinking water, there is no charge to their care. There are also 8 diseases for which presumptive status for benefits was granted for those who served at Lejeune including Multiple Myeloma, Adult leukemia, and Non-Hodgkin's Lymphoma (3 of the blood cancers identified in our Fort Ord cohort).¹⁰

Basic fairness would be to stop the cycle of delay, deny, and hope they die which has been the sad reality for those seeking VA care and benefits after being poisoned at Fort Ord. This is why we stand with the families including the civilians who unknowingly were exposed to the contamination as they seek justice. We are respectfully requesting parity with the same healthcare and benefits guaranteed to those exposed at Lejeune. And because this is now a pattern across branches and including several other DOD sites, we are further demanding proactive policies that protect the other Lejeunes that may be identified. We respectfully request the following further federal actions:

- Creating a Health Registry similar to the Airborne Hazards and Open Burn Pit Registry that allows for growing the body of knowledge of potential conditions related to contamination at Fort Ord and other DOD sites.
- Requiring periodic review of the registry as well as reassessment by ATSDR of emerging epidemiological evidence that would substantiate adding conditions to the presumptive list for VA benefits coverage.
- Establishing a Medical Monitoring program for those impacted that will be guided by information learned through the Registry.

1. Cancer and illnesses from Fort Ord, CA military base:
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/305872653630891/>
2. EPA Superfund Site report. Available at:
<https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/CurSites/csinfo.cfm?id=0902783&msspp=med>
3. EPA Superfund Contaminant List. Available at:
<https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.contams&id=0902783&fbclid=IwAR0EsetwJ2BIfWD7PLJoQ6Cluas-LojWYTVrRmsXznVohhrqZ28waTlnTVCY>
4. Benzene exposure and multiple myeloma: a detailed meta-analysis of benzene cohort studies. Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17119195/>
5. Human Health Effects of Tetrachloroethylene: Key Findings and Scientific Issues. Available at: <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/ehp.1307359>
6. ATSDR Addendum to the Toxicological Profile for Methylene Chloride. Available at: https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxprofiles/methylene_chloride_addendum.pdf
7. Human Health Effects of Dichloromethane: Key Findings and Scientific Issues. Available at: <https://ehp.niehs.nih.gov/doi/10.1289/ehp.1308030>
8. Trichloroethylene and cancer: epidemiologic evidence. Available at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1637753/>
9. ATSDR Assessment of the Evidence for the Drinking Water Contaminants at Camp Lejeune. Available at:

https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/sites/lejeune/docs/atsdr_summary_of_the_evidence_for_causality_tce_pce_508.pdf

10. Camp Lejeune Past Water Contamination. VA Public Health. Available at:

<https://www.publichealth.va.gov/exposures/camp-lejeune/>