



News Release

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DORGAN & FIVE OTHER SENATORS CALL FOR INSPECTOR GENERAL INVESTIGATION OF ARMY'S RESPONSE TO EXPOSURE OF U.S. TROOPS TO DEADLY SODIUM DICHROMATE

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) --- U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), and five other U.S. Senators are calling for a Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General's investigation into the Army's response to the exposure of hundreds of U.S. soldiers in Iraq to a deadly carcinogen. Dorgan said the Army's response appears to be "totally inadequate."

They made the request Tuesday in a letter to DOD Inspector General Gordon S. Heddell. Joining Dorgan in making the request are Senators Robert Byrd (D-WV), Evan Bayh (D-IN), Jay Rockefeller (D-WV), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI)

Dorgan chaired a hearing on August 3, by the Senate Democratic Policy Committee (DPC), which looked into the Army's response to the 2003 exposure at Qarmat Ali in Iraq of hundreds of U.S. soldiers to sodium dichromate, which poses the highest inhalation risk for cancer of any of the 500 substances classified as a carcinogen by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The Senators wrote that they "believe that the conduct and/or inaction of KBR and the Army may have caused hundreds of U.S. troops to be exposed to dangerous levels of sodium dichromate," and asked the Inspector General to investigate seven separate areas of concern.

"We know that multiple failures by contractor KBR lead to this exposure," Dorgan said, "but it is also becoming clear that the Army's multiple failures resulted in soldiers not being warned about the contamination, not being provided personal protective gear, not having their symptoms taken seriously, and not being tested in a timely manner."

At the August 3rd hearing, the 20th hearing on waste, fraud and corruption in Iraq contracting conducted by the DPC since 2003, the Committee heard from four former soldiers who were exposed at Qarmat Ali and are now suffering health difficulties. A 21 year-old soldier from Oregon has already died from the exposure.

The former soldiers said neither KBR nor the Army took steps to protect soldiers from, or even warn them about, the deadly chemical.

Herman Gibb, Ph.D., one of the world's leading experts on sodium dichromate exposure, told the Committee that a report from the Army's Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (USACHPPM) contained inconsistencies and conflicting conclusions, and the blood tests performed on some soldiers were inadequate and taken too long after the exposure.

Dr. Gibb also told the Committee that soldiers may have been exposed to 80 to 200 times the federal limit for worker exposure to sodium dichromate. He said the Army's study and its notification letter to soldiers seemed to minimize the dangers.

"I wish I could say the Department of Defense has done everything in its search for the truth, but sadly, I don't feel that's the case," Dorgan said. "Both KBR and the Army, to this day, continue to deny that the exposure was significant."

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