



News Release

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DOD INSPECTOR GENERAL TO INVESTIGATE ARMY'S RESPONSE TO EXPOSURE OF U.S. TROOPS TO DEADLY CHEMICAL IN IRAQ

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) --- The Defense Department's Inspector General (IG) will investigate the U.S. Army's response to the 2003 exposure of hundreds of U.S. soldiers to the deadly chemical sodium dichromate in Iraq.

A major component of sodium dichromate is hexavalent chromium, one of the most carcinogenic substances on earth. The Senate Democratic Policy Committee has held two hearings on the exposure, revealing a number of failures by contractor KBR to warn troops, and even their own employees, of the exposure and to clean up the contamination. The hearings also exposed multiple failures by the Army to hold KBR accountable and to properly inform and test soldiers once the Army did learn of the contamination.

The Department of Defense (DOD) Inspector General's investigation of the Army's actions was requested in August by Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND), who called and chaired the DPC hearings on the issue, and six other members of the U.S. Senate, including Senators Robert Byrd (D-WV), Jay Rockefeller (D-WVA), Evan Bayh (D-IN), Ron Wyden (D-OR), Jeff Merkley (D-OR) and Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI).

Charles Beardall, the Deputy Inspector General for Policy and Oversight, has informed the Senators by letter that the IG will initiate an investigation that will begin this month. The Senators asked the IG to investigate seven specific areas related to the exposure and the Army's response to it.

Dorgan said the hearings revealed "repeated and almost unbelievable failures by both the contractor, KBR, and the Army to take needed steps to protect and even to inform soldiers and workers who were needlessly exposed to this deadly chemical. We want to know how it happened, why it happened, and who is being held accountable. An IG investigation is not only welcome, it is overdue."

"Oregon National Guard members have suffered serious health problems as a result of the deliberate contamination of the facility by the Iraqi army," Wyden said. "This investigation will determine whether the U.S. Army and KBR took appropriate precautions to safeguard the health of National Guard members and appropriate action after exposure. I thank the Inspector General for conducting this investigation and look forward to his report."

Another concern of the Senators has been whether the Army is adequately informing the Department of Veterans Affairs about the exposure and its potentially deadly consequences. Having such information is vital to proper treatment and even the ability of former soldiers to be treated by the VA for a "service connected" sickness that could take years after the initial exposure to develop.

In his letter informing the Senators of the investigation, Beardall said the IG will coordinate his investigation with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

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