

Report says U.S. military poisoning American communities with toxic chemicals

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An aerial view of the Pentagon building in Washington. (Photo: Reuters)

Washington, April 8 (RHC)-- The U.S. Department of Defense is secretly burning one of the most enduring, indestructible toxic chemicals known to man -- Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) -- despite its grave risks to human health.

Data published by Bennington College show that AFFF, which is a Per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), is being incinerated near disadvantaged communities in the United States. There is no evidence to show that incineration actually destroys these synthetic chemicals, but there are good reasons to believe that the burning simply emits these toxins into the air and onto nearby communities, farms, and waterways.

Yet, as the new data show, the U.S. military ordered the clandestine burning of over 20 million pounds of AFFF and AFFF waste between 2016 and 2020. The Pentagon is effectively carrying out a toxic experiment whose unwitting subjects are millions of Americans.

Exposure to trace amounts of these “forever chemicals” is strongly linked to a large number of cancers, developmental disorders, immune dysfunction, and infertility. It has also been linked to aggravated infections caused by Covid-19 and weakened vaccine effectiveness.

In December 2016, the US Armed Forces conducted a survey of military bases, identifying 393 sites of AFFF contamination in the country, including 126 sites where PFAS compounds infiltrated public drinking water.

In 2019, the Pentagon admitted those numbers were “under-counted,” and that, according to the Environmental Working Group’s popular map of PFAS contamination, the current number of polluted military sites stands at 704, a number that continues to increase.

A number of states have pressured the Department of Defense to address the widespread problem. New Jersey, Massachusetts, Michigan, New York, New Jersey, New Hampshire and Vermont have all passed regulations on PFAS in drinking water, but some of them are now unable to enforce those standards when the federal government violates them, according to Bloomberg Law.

Portsmouth, New Hampshire, Colorado Springs, Colorado and other communities near US military bases have all been affected during the last decade. “Mapping the sites of PFAS contamination in the United States, the Department of Defense stands out as a significant contributor to this dismal list,” Dave Andrews of Environmental Working Group (EWG) told David Bond, Associate Director at Center for the Advancement of Public Action (CAPA) at Bennington College.

The Pentagon might be hastening efforts to dispose of AFFF before it is classified as a hazardous waste, Bond noted. Invented and popularized by the U.S. Armed Forces, AFFF was introduced during the Vietnam War to combat petroleum fires on naval ships and air strips.

The chemical is a synthetic molecular bond stronger than anything known in nature and is virtually indestructible once manufactured. The carbon-fluorine bond overpowers and tames even the most incendiary infernos.

Highlighting the “strong flame inhibition effects” of the bond, a 2020 EPA report concluded, “It is not well understood how effective high-temperature combustion is in completely destroying PFAS.” Also, last year, an influential interstate environmental council refused to endorse burning AFFF, arguing incineration is still “an active area of research.”

As the US Armed Forces became the world’s biggest consumer of AFFF, troubling questions as to what happens after the burning of the chemical were brushed aside. U.S. military bases, both in and outside the country, encouraged the spraying of AFFF in routine drills while firefighters were told it was as safe as soap.

In 2018, federal scientists decided to publish a comprehensive review of the toxic chemistry of AFFF, but Pentagon officials called that science “a public relations nightmare” and sought to suppress the findings.

The U.S. military still possesses a tremendous amount of AFFF and despite its extraordinary resistance to fire, incineration secretly became the military’s preferred method of handling the toxic chemical.

“We knew that this would be a costly endeavor, since it meant we’d be burning something that was engineered to put out fires,” Steve Schneider, chief of Hazardous Disposal for the logistics wing of the Department of Defense, said in 2017 as the operation was underway.

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