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HAGAN URGES SECRETARY OF THE NAVY TO DISCLOSE FULL INFORMATION REGARDING CAMP LEJEUNE WATER CONTAMINATION

Wednesday, May 13, 2009

WASHINGTON, D.C. - In an effort to assist military families exposed to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, U.S. Senator Kay R. Hagan (D-NC) today sent a letter to Acting United States Secretary of the Navy BJ Penn, asking him to help close information gaps in the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry's (ATSDR) 1997 public health assessment. New information about the levels of benzene, TCE and PCE in Camp Lejeune's water supply recently invalidated sections of the public health assessment. Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) joined Senator Hagan in sending the letter.

"Since the 1997 study, new information has surfaced that has provided additional insight into exposure to harmful chemicals in the drinking water at Camp Lejeune, and has challenged the validity of ATSDR's public health assessment," said Hagan. "Until we effectively assess the ways in which families were exposed, and the affects of exposure to Camp Lejeune's contaminated drinking water, those who have seen their loved ones suffer from related sickness, or pass away, will be without the answers they deserve."

The 1997 public health assessment stated that Marines and their families faced little or no cancer risk from drinking and bathing in ground water at Camp Lejeune that was chemically-tainted by solvents known as TCE and PCE. In late April of this year, ATSDR said it could no longer stand by parts of its assessment due to data inaccuracies and the omission of other contaminants.

The Department of the Navy progress reports from 1984 showed high levels of benzene in the water supply at Hadnot Point, yet there is no consideration of benzene in the ATSDR's reports. This omission implies the information was not provided to the ATSDR and is one of the primary reasons the ATSDR withdrew its endorsement of the public health assessment in question.

The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) is conducting a Congressionally-mandated comprehensive review of scientific literature and potential health risks related to water contamination exposures at Camp Lejeune. The study is expected to be made public in the upcoming weeks. However, at the moment, the study is limited in scope to TCE and PCE. It is important to consider whether or not NAS should also take into account documented levels of benzene in Camp Lejeune.

Senator Hagan's letter, which was sent today, asks Secretary Penn, along with the Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Installations and Environment, to determine what caused these information gaps, and implement appropriate measures to ensure that all relevant information is available to assess the effects of human exposure to Camp Lejeune's contaminated drinking water in an expeditious fashion.

Hagan believes the victims and their families have been waiting patiently for answers about Camp Lejeune's water supply and levels of contamination long enough. After nearly 20 years of looking for answers and closure, they deserve an opportunity to end this painful chapter of their lives. Persistent delays and the inability to provide key documentation to environmental and public health studies have prevented them from doing so.

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