



**Action Needed to Address the US Military's (PFAS) Contamination(s)
(This ONE article about Pease Air Force Base is only a symptom of a
MUCH LARGER problem as I mention below. ~Don Chapin)**

Derrick Z. Jackson, fellow | September 25, 2018, 9:30 am EST

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(Today, Dec. 2018, I'm aware of four ex-USAF Air Police (APs) that were stationed with me at Ramey AFB, Puerto Rico. Two of them have died from bladder cancer and the two remaining have been diagnosed with the same malady. The base has been designated as an environmental clean-up zone (toxic waste being indiscriminately discarded, but requiring AP guards before the base was decommissioned), but the VA doesn't recognize the commonality of the systems, despite that situation.... an Agent Orange situation, all over again, but where the 'victims' don't have the resources or life expectancy to take the situation to court.

Ramey AFB hazardous waste that I personally know of would be hundreds of used trichlorethelene and toluene wipes, many with particles of Plutonium from cleaning Plutonium spheres used in nuclear weapons of the day.

In Kansas (McConnell Air Force Base) I cleaned a spalling sphere from a "training" Mk 6 Mod 6 weapon, which means a LOT o Plutonium particles in the waste because I KNOW the people in charge had NO IDEA how poisenous it was.

The bottom line is that ANY military base leaves a contaminated waste area behind~ Don Chapin, Capt. USAF, Ret'd, ex-nuclear weapons electronics technition/team chief... ref. my bio.)

There was dead silence at a community meeting last week in Portsmouth, New Hampshire after Nancy Eaton spoke before a panel of top federal health officials planning a study of per- and polyfluoroalkyl (PFAS) contamination at the former Pease Air Force Base. She described how her husband David, who was healthy all his life, died quickly in 2012 at 63 from pancreatic cancer.

David Eaton served four decades in the Air National Guard based out of Pease and saw duty in Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and Iraq. Nancy said David drank the base's water and the coffee brewed with the same water every day, on top of being exposed to toxic chemicals as an airplane mechanic.

"He loved every second of the 40.7 years he proudly served our country," Eaton told the panel of experts from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), a division of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Unfortunately, Eaton said, "my husband and I never had the chance to retire together, take a couple of trips nor build our retirement home."

She said she was not alone as a premature widow, noting that several of her husband's comrades died of cancer and others have suffered tumors of the brain, lung, mouth and breast. She concluded by saying that her husband and others served their country without asking questions, "never thinking their lives would be cut short due to carcinogens on the job. Our families deserve answers as well as preventing this from happening again."

Eaton's sentiments were echoed by Andrea Amico, a co-founder of Testing for Pease, a group of parents whose children drank contaminated water at the site's daycare center, and whose demands for a thorough investigation of PFAS harms have now resulted in establishing Pease as a key location in the first nationwide federal study of those harms.

A nationwide problem

Eaton's and Amico's pleas for answers are part of a growing chorus across the country. The latest scientific research suggests that this group of chemicals is more harmful to human health than previously recognized. The group of chemicals known as PFAS, common in many

household products such as non-stick cookware and water-repellant carpeting, are linked to several cancers, liver damage, thyroid disease, asthma and reproductive and fetal health disorders. [A report](#) from the Environmental Working Group says as many as 110 million Americans may be drinking PFAS-laced water. Nowhere, however, is the problem as acute as it appears to be on US military sites where PFAS compounds have been heavily used for training in fire suppression and the chemicals have been routinely allowed to drain into groundwater.

According [to a new report and interactive map](#) from the Union of Concerned Scientists (UCS), the levels at Pease, a Superfund site, are 43,545 times above what the ATSDR considers safe, and some 30,000 people live within three miles of the base. Some 9,500 employees work in the 250 businesses in the current trade port that was once part of the base itself. The military has shut down the worst polluted drinking water well but residents remain concerned about the groundwater contamination. An Air Force official told the Portsmouth Herald in July that it [could take up to a decade](#) to resolve the issue even with state-of-the-art water filtration.

Worse yet, Pease is just one of more than 100 military sites with similar problems. The UCS study looked at 131 military sites and found that *all but one* had levels in excess of what the government now considers safe. The vast majority—some 87 bases—reported PFAS concentrations more than 100 times safe levels and 10 of those military sites had concentrations 100,000 to 1 million times higher than the government’s recommended “safe” levels.

Trump Administration tried to suppress new findings

Concern has mounted over the past year about the danger posed by the PFAS group of chemicals. In May, [UCS published](#) emails obtained under the Freedom of Information Act that indicated that the Trump administration was suppressing a study reviewing the link between PFAS and disease in humans.

In [a now-infamous January 30 email](#) discussing the decision to delay publication of the PFAS report, Office of Management and Budget Associate Director James Herz relayed the concern of an aide in the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs that: “The public, media,

and Congressional reaction to these numbers is going to be huge. The impact to EPA and [the Defense Department] is going to be extremely painful.” Herz fretted about “the potential public relations nightmare” it would be for the report to be released.

Thanks to pressure brought after the emails were exposed, the [850-page ATSDR study](#) on the toxicity and prevalence of 14 PFAS compounds was released in June. The study sets new recommendations for safe exposure to PFAS compounds 7-to-10 times lower than currently recommended by the EPA. Notably, though, this group of chemicals has so far managed to escape any enforceable limits because EPA has never officially listed them on its registry of toxic chemicals.

It is nothing short of outrageous that worries of a public relations headache almost won out over the actual public health nightmare that millions of Americans face greater risks from exposure to PFAS than previously recognized. The entire class of PFAS should be immediately registered on EPA’s list of toxic pollutants and the Defense Department should ask Congress for enough resources to clean up the contamination.

Pressure mounts for action

Andrea Amico from Pease, age 36, said she worries every day if and when health effects might show up in her husband, who drank Pease water at work for nine years and whose first two children drank the water in day care. She said close to 100 people have contacted her, worried that their serious illnesses are related to PFAS exposure. “We’ve heard from women having problems with fertility to the point where one woman told me she worked in an office where all the women had fertility problems,” she said.

Similar concerns are being echoed all around the country. This week, Amico is scheduled to testify before a Senate subcommittee alongside Arnie Leriche, a former EPA environmental engineer who lives near the former Wurtsmith Air Force Base in northern Michigan. PFAS compounds there were recorded at 73,636 times the level considered safe by ATSDR’s new recommendations.

Asked how it feels to be to be advocating for answers on pollution after investigating it at EPA for nearly four decades, Leriche said he felt “a lot

of disappointment that the agency hasn't been able to conduct the mission the way it should," both amid the Trump administration's current attempt to gut clean air and water rules of the 1970s, and the inconsistent focus and inadequate EPA funding over the years by both Democratic and Republican administrations. "But there's a lot of career employees at EPA, engineers, Forest Service who are sticking their neck out, not going to let this happen quietly."

Michigan, with its heavy industrial history, has a long, troubled relationship with PFAS. Clean water advocates were staggered this summer when the MLive Media Group, which represents many newspapers in mid-sized cities in the state, [discovered through a Freedom of Information Act](#) request that the state Department of Environmental Quality sat for nearly six years on a report warning of potential widespread PFAS contamination. It is the same DEQ that sat on the Flint Water Crisis.

[The report](#), prepared by state environmental specialist Robert Delaney, found perfluoroalkyl levels in fish "on an order of magnitude higher than anything documented in the literature to date." With contamination evident throughout the food web, from algae and zebra mussels to mink and bald eagles, the report indicated Michigan was suffering from "widespread contamination," with little monitoring and "an endless list of things that could and possibly should be done. However, first, those in authority have to be convinced that there is a crisis."

One of those trying to convince the state to care about PFAS, despite its horrific neglect of Flint, is Cody Angell. He has been a lead advocate for [testing and remediation of industrial PFAS](#) in communities north of Grand Rapids. Like the residents at Pease, Angell says Michigan has many anecdotal cases of cancer and residents want answers and action to address the problem.

"Every day, more and more people are realizing that government has failed us," Angell said. "When you hear that government is more concerned about public relations than people, that is really like saying they are knowingly poisoning people. But as long as we can keep PFAS in the news, we'll get results at some point."

Back at Pease, keeping PFAS in the news is precisely Amico's goal as well. At the meeting, she read a letter from Doris Brock, widow of Kendall Brock, who served 35 years at Pease and died last year of bladder and prostate cancer at the age 67. Doris Brock said she keeps a list of 70 members of military families she knows were hit with organ cancers and 40 are now dead.

"We don't want just studies," Amico said. "We want medical monitoring and physicians have to know what these chemicals are so people can be treated properly."

Ken Lauter, 69, who worked at Pease for 24 years in military and commercial aircraft maintenance and security, told the community meeting that he too has been battling cancer. His lymphoma was discovered when he went to the doctor for what he thought was a pinched nerve that limited use of his left arm.

He said that in the 1990s, people's suspicions abounded about the water as taped signs with skulls and crossbones appeared above water fountains. Once, when an air tanker exploded, he said, he and other responders waded knee deep in fire fighting foam, a key source of PFAS.

"We were in (chemicals) up to our neck doing our jobs every day . . . I did my job. So did these other guys and this is the price we pay. Investigate. Please check it out for these people," Lauter said.

It's long past time for the government to act.



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