

ISSUE BRIEF: Toxic Exposures at Fort McClellan

The Situation

- Fort McClellan, located in Anniston, Alabama, became an Army installation in 1917, during World War I. After World War II until the base closed in 1999, it was home of the Chemical Corps and Chemical Weapons school for the United States Army. In 1953, Fort McClellan conducted “Operation Top Hat” which used military personnel to test exposure and decontamination methods that included sulfur mustard and nerve agents and in 1962, Fort McClellan added the Biological Radiological Agency.
- From 1929 to 1971, a Monsanto chemical plant operated south of Fort McClellan in Anniston. Airborne polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) from the plant entered into the environment and the surrounding community was exposed. In 2003, Monsanto Chemical settled a class action lawsuit with more than 200,000 residents of Anniston for more than \$700 million.
- Although the base closed in 1999, the 2005 National Academy of Medicine, formerly the Institute of Medicine, Report, “*Contaminants in the Subsurface: Source Zone Assessment and Remediation*,” recognized that both the groundwater and soil were contaminated. There were 67 different disposal sites on Fort McClellan containing volatile organic compounds (VOCs) trichloroethylene (TCEs), PCBs, semi-volatile organic compound (SVOCs), pesticides, explosives, heavy metals (Pb), unexploded ordinance (UXO), radioactive sources, and non-stockpile chemical materials.
- The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Health Administration (VHA) has recognized the potential exposures at Fort McClellan, noting that potential exposures could have included, but are not limited to, the following:
 - Radioactive compounds (cesium-137 and cobalt-60) used in decontamination training activities in isolated locations on base.
 - Chemical warfare agents (mustard gas and nerve agents) used in decontamination testing activities in isolated locations on base.
 - Airborne PCBs from the Monsanto plant in Anniston.

The Challenge

- While VA does acknowledge these potential exposures, it does not recognize any adverse health conditions associated with service at Fort McClellan. VA has noted that although exposures to high levels of these compounds have been shown to cause a variety of adverse health effects in humans and laboratory animals, there is no evidence of exposures of this magnitude having occurred at Fort McClellan.

The Solution

- Congress must immediately enact legislation to authorize scientific studies of the environmental and toxic exposures at Fort McClellan and to establish a registry specific to those service members who served on Fort McClellan.
- Congress should establish a concession of exposure to toxins for the veterans who were exposed on Fort McClellan.