

PCBs Contamination Continues to Affect the Health of Unalakleet's Residents

"Parkinson's disease had not been seen in the Alaska Native population in the past. I believe PCBs and other toxics left behind by the military contributed to the disease I and others have been diagnosed with." - *Stephen Ivanoff, Unalakleet resident*

Unalakleet, population 800, is located on the Norton Sound at the mouth of the Unalakleet River, which is 395 miles northwest of Anchorage, Alaska.

From 1958 to 1978, the U.S. Air Force operated the North River Radio Relay Station (RRS) in the Unalakleet area for defense and civilian communications. When military activities in the surrounding area ended, buildings, debris, and thousands of 55-gallon drums were left behind, saturating the tundra and infecting the local food and water sources.

In fact, the land around the former RRS is used for hunting, berry picking, and recreation. Soil contaminated by polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) was discovered on the site on July 10, 2003.

The presence of PCBs is a significant environmental concern. Local residents are regularly exposed to these PCBs through direct contact with the contaminated soil. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, all Unalakleet residents received their local drinking water from below the air force base installation of RRS. Residents are concerned that the early exposure to PCBs have led to degenerative diseases and death.

Issue: The U.S. Government left contaminated debris on traditional subsistence hunting lands in Unalakleet, Alaska.

Requested Action: Meaningful appropriations are needed to expedite clean-up of PCBs contamination in Unalakleet. Further studies need to occur to test for exposure of PCBs amongst Unalakleet's residents and their possible side effects.



Timeline:

1958-1978: U.S. Air Force operated the North River Radio Relay Station.

1986-1989: U.S. Army Corps of Engineers investigated the site and published three sampling reports.

1993-1995: Two Army Corps contractors demolished buildings at North River RRS and buried all debris.

2002: An Army Corps contractor removed approximately 3,300 drums scattered across a 10-square mile area, including Alaska Native allotment sites.

July 10, 2003: Air Force was notified by Emily Nanouk, a Native allotment owner, that she suspected there was contaminated soil on her property. The Air Force personnel confirmed high levels of PCBs on her soil. In September the Air Force removed 31,350 pounds of contaminated soil from near her property.

2004: Clean-up actions for the remainder of the sites near RRS began in the summer of 2004, but a larger volume than estimated was found and logistical complications prevented the removal of all contaminated soil. The contaminated soil still exists with fencing and warning signs around it.

August 2, 2013: Native allotment resident, Emily Nanouk, wrote to the Alaska delegation requesting new allotment lands due to the continued contamination on her soil.

August 27, 2013: Unalakleet resident, Stephen Ivanoff, testified in front of the Environmental Protection Agency that PCBs still exist on Unalakleet homelands and may have contributed to his autoimmune disease.

Questions?

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