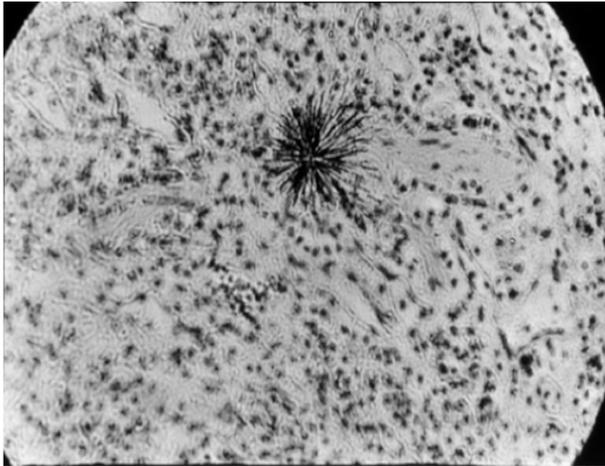


Calif. Wildfire Spread Radiation from Contaminated Reactor Testing Complex

Continued from cover

Radioactive micro-particles in ash and recently-settled dusts collected just after the Woolsey fire, were “found in Thousand Oaks, CA, and Simi Valley, CA, about nine and three miles from SSFL, respectively. The Thousand Oaks samples had alpha count rates up to 19 times background,” the study reports. The researchers noted that alpha radiation-emitting thorium was the source of this excess radioactivity. The authors warn of small, dispersed alpha particles because of the “high risk of inhalation-related long-term biological damage from internal alpha emitters compared to external radiation,” the authors report.

Had the state and the parties responsible for the contamination (Boeing, NASA, and the Energy Department) met their legally binding obligations to clean up SSFL by the 2017 deadline, the 2018 fire couldn’t have released contamination. Further failure to clean the site poses continuing risks to the nearby population, warned Congressional and local elected officials in an Oct. 14 letter.



This photo’s black star shows tracks made by alpha rays emitted from a particle of plutonium in the lung tissue of an ape. Inside the body, alpha rays can penetrate more than 10,000 cells within their range. Photo by Robert Del Tredici, *At Work in the Fields of the Bomb*, 1987.

Lawmakers Complain of Clean-up Failure, Delays, and Gutted Decontamination Standards

There is widespread concern among elected officials and the community about secret negotiations between the state and Boeing Corp. that could further delay the cleanup, and allow giant military contractor to walk away from its radioactive and chemical contamination. California Congressional rep’s Brad Sherman, Julia Brownley, Jose Luis Correa, Graciela Flores Napolitano, and US Senator Alex Padilla sent a letter to CalEPA October 14 reminding the agency: “The 2007 Consent Order and 2020 Administrative Orders on Consent ... required that soil cleanup be completed by 2017, however the agreed upon soil remediation at the site has yet to begin. We are deeply concerned about the lengthy delays....” In addition, County Supervisors from Ventura and Los Angeles County, six city mayors, and a Los Angeles City Council member wrote October 14 to CalEPA declaring, “We are opposed to any action that would significantly delay or weaken site cleanup.” The officials singled out the

state’s failure to enforce the 2007 Consent Order, confidential negotiations between DTSC and Boeing, and potential changes to methodology rules that could delay or weaken clean-up requirements; as well as delays in the Programmatic Environmental Impact Report.

The core of such a Boeing-Newsom Administration deal could allow as much as twenty times higher levels of contamination than permitted currently. CalEPA remains in secret negotiations with Boeing.

“Federally funded studies have previously confirmed that contamination [above] US EPA levels of concern has migrated off site, and that the incidence of key cancers in the neighboring communities increases with proximity to the site,” said Denise Duffield, associate director of Physicians for Social Responsibility-Los Angeles. “In addition, site owner Boeing has been fined hundreds of thousands of dollars for exceeding contamination limits in surface water runoff leaving the site over many years. Until [those] responsible for the pollution finally live up to their clean-up agreements, people living around the site will be at further risk to their health,” Duffield said.

“The bottom line is, if SSFL had been cleaned up by 2017 as required by the clean-up agreements, the community wouldn’t have had to worry about contamination released by the Woolsey Fire,” said Melissa Bumstead, co-founder of Parents vs. SSFL. “My daughter is a two-time cancer survivor, and no parent should have to worry that the SSFL might give their child cancer when there’s a fire on site, or when it rains or it’s windy.”

Staggering Military Suicide Rates

A September Pentagon report shows a 41% increase in suicides among active-duty troops from 2015 to 2020, and suicides among US Army’s active-duty forces jumped 46% in the second quarter of 2021, compared to the same period last year. On the heels of this news, a military inspector general’s report released November 12 found that US troops are not regularly screened for suicide risk as they leave active-duty. “Furthermore, the [military] may not arrange for continuing mental health care for thousands of transitioning service members with existing mental health conditions,” the IG said.

30,000 since 9/11, four times total combat deaths

The grim active-duty suicide reports only hint at the overall suicide rate including veterans. The larger picture was presented June 21 in a report by the Costs of War Project at Brown University. The study, “High Suicide Rates among United States Service Members and Veterans of the Post-9/11 Wars,” found a staggering 30,177 active-duty personnel and veterans who served in the military since 9/11 have died by suicide — four times the 7,057 killed in military occupations and warzones over the same period. Yet, even this jaw-dropping number is a fraction of the whole.

“In total, there were 89,100 confirmed US veteran suicides between 2005 [when the Pentagon began tracking suicide rates] and 2018, including veterans of the Global War on Terror and also previous wars such as the Vietnam War,” wrote author Thomas Suitt.

Suitt found that “continued access to guns” as well as “the rise of improvised explosive devices, the attendant rise in traumatic brain injuries, the war’s protracted length, advances in medical treatment that keep service members in the military longer, and the American public’s disinterest in the post-9/11 wars, have greatly contributed to increased suicide rates.”

“Even the very conservative estimate that I came up with, it’s horrifying,” said Suitt in an interview with NPR. Every suicide among military service members should stand as a criminal indictment of a government that sends its men and women into endless, undeclared, unwinnable wars around the world.

— *If you or someone you know may be considering suicide, contact the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 (En Español: 1-888-628-9454; Deaf and Hard of Hearing: 1-800-799-4889) or the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741.*

US Senators Join Fight for Palomares Vets’ Compensation

Editor’s note: Four US senators have urged Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough to withdraw the VA’s appeal of a federal court order granting class action status to veterans contaminated with plutonium in Palomares, Spain, after a 1966 nuclear weapons crash. The senators’ October 12, 2021 letter, lightly edited, follows.

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We write to respectfully request you withdraw your appeal in *Skaar v. McDonough* now before the US Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, concerning the claims of approximately 1,400 veterans exposed to dangerous radiation during the 1966 nuclear clean-up operation in Palomares, Spain. Instead of pursuing your appeal, which will only serve to further delay relief for these veterans, we urge you to use your rulemaking authority to finally provide long-overdue care and assistance to Palomares veterans by including Palomares in the list of [service related] “radiation-risk activities” under 38 CFR 3.309. Events with lower levels of radiation exposure are already on that list, and civilian workers who buried sealed barrels filled with Palomares soil — a similar, but even less risky task than that performed by the Palomares veterans — receive presumptive benefits...

By way of background, in 1966, approximately 1,400 US service members were exposed to dangerous levels of ionizing radiation when they were deployed to clean up the crash site of a B-52 bomber which was carrying nuclear warheads. These service members worked, slept, and ate at the crash site, shoveling radioactive plutonium dust into barrels for weeks without proper protective equipment. In the decades since, many of those veterans have developed radiation-related illnesses that require medical treatment and numerous veterans have already died from these conditions, leaving the survivors to continue to fight for recognition and benefits. The US Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims (CAVC) recently ordered the VA to reexamine the methodology by which it adjudicates disability benefits claims for veterans of the 1966 Palomares nuclear disaster. This decision came one year after the CAVC had permitted veteran Victor Skaar to proceed with this challenge *on behalf of a class of Palomares veterans*. [emphasis added]

At its heart, Mr. Skaar’s legal challenge is about the failure to recognize the radiation exposure of the Palomares veterans. The VA does not include Palomares in its list of radiation exposure events ... and it has relied on an unsound method to calculate

individual exposures instead.... The merits of this argument have not yet been resolved. Rather, the CAVC ordered only that the Board of Veterans’ Appeals is required to review Mr. Skaar’s evidence and adequately adjudicate his legal challenge. Yet, the VA has chosen to appeal even this interim ruling.

... The Court’s orders in *Skaar*, from which you now appeal, are long-awaited, critical steps towards securing benefits and health care for these veterans. Tragically, many of them have died during their decades-long fight for recognition, and the very youngest among them are now in their seventies. We urge you not to further prolong justice for these now aging and ill veterans by pursuing an unnecessary appeal of the Court’s class certification and remand orders, before the merits of the Palomares veterans’ claims have fully been heard. This case truly embodies the legal maxim that justice delayed is justice denied. The VA’s decision to appeal the Court’s class certification and remand orders before the merits have been fully reached, will add potentially years of delay to resolution of this case, when the affected service members simply do not have that time to spare. To put it bluntly, more Palomares veterans will die during the pendency of this litigation if the VA continues with this appeal. You have the authority to act to their benefit, and we strongly urge you to do so expeditiously by withdrawing your appeal.

Sincerely, Sherrod Brown, D-Ohio, Dianne Feinstein, D-California, Christopher Coons, D-Delaware, Richard Blumenthal, D-Connecticut.

Note from the Lead Plaintiff

On November 8, Victor Skaar emailed Nukewatch with this update: “I obtained the ‘official’ urinalyses of myself and of each of the other ‘high 26’ [who were] selected by USAF medical scientists to submit follow-up specimens to the Radiological Health Lab, six, twelve, and eighteen months after departure [from Spain]. Those were the *only* data evaluated by the USAF Surgeon General’s contracted bio-environmental engineering team — Labat-Anderson.... [This team] *did not* consider *any* specimen results collected and submitted while we were on the [Palomares] site, working with constant exposure to plutonium and other radioactive materials. Obviously, that stupid, arbitrary, non-scientific decision resulted in the ‘desired’ mathematical result of our exposure of 4.6 rems — slightly less than the [allowed maximum] of 5.0 rems — therefore, we were ‘not exposed.’

“To me John, this is evidence of the AF/SG Staff knowingly, and purposely, falsifying the *official* data to demonstrate our ‘non-exposure.’” — *Victor Skaar*