

P R E S S R E L E A S E

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Citizens Win Shutdown of Kirtland AFB Open Burning; Now Challenge Open Detonations and Perchlorate Contamination in Albuquerque's Groundwater

Protect Air and Water (PAW), Albuquerque and Santa Fe environmental organizations and over a thousand petitioners shared a victory with the New Mexico Environment Department in halting the annual open burning of 80,000 pounds hazardous waste at Kirtland Air Force Base. Supporters to end open burning and detonation included many residents living nearby Kirtland AFB and health care workers.

Citizen concerns still remain high for the Open Detonation unit that will explode up to 100,000 pounds a year of hazardous waste. Citizen Action New Mexico, Citizens for Alternatives to Radioactive Dumping (CARD) and Registered Geologist Robert Gilkeson, requested by letter that Secretary Ron Curry of the New Mexico Environment Department make efforts to:

- stop the ongoing detonation of hazardous waste;
- install groundwater monitoring wells, and;
- clean up the toxic wastes such as perchlorate and heavy metals.

Open detonation practices at the Kirtland AFB Explosive Ordnance Depot have much more impact on Albuquerque's air quality compared to open burning. Six pages worth of dangerous chemicals and heavy metals are exploded into Albuquerque's breathing air.

The largest source of the toxic waste for open detonation is from tens of thousands of pounds of rocket motors sent to Kirtland AFB from Sandia Labs.

The disposal of rocket motors and ammunition has led to widespread contamination of groundwater by perchlorates at Kirtland AFB and other military installations in New Mexico and 21 other states. Drinking water for millions of persons has been contaminated by Perchlorate.

A 2005 National Academies of Science report reveals that perchlorates are roughly ten times more toxic to humans than the Department of Defense has been claiming. Perchlorate can inhibit thyroid function, cause birth defects and lower IQs, and are considered particularly dangerous to children. 97% of breast milk samples taken randomly from around the U.S. have tested positive for perchlorates.

A letter from Environment Department Secretary Ron Curry to the Environmental Protection Agency describes that perchlorate found at Kirtland AFB and Sandia Labs is

entering into Albuquerque's city municipal drinking water wells. Secretary Curry stated, "Data collected in 2008 showed perchlorate in the School House Mesa Well. Yet very little groundwater monitoring data has been obtained for perchlorate at Kirtland."

The only monitoring well at the Explosive Ordinance site is the School House Mesa Well.

According to Robert Gilkeson, a Registered Geologist and hydrogeologist, "A minimum of three downgradient monitoring wells and one background monitoring well are required to be installed at the range under the Hazardous Waste Act. The groundwater monitoring at the Kirtland AFB open detonation range "is completely unreliable for water sampling as is true for numerous groundwater monitoring wells at Kirtland AFB, Sandia Labs and Los Alamos National Laboratories.

Mr. Gilkeson adds that although the School House Mesa Well is detecting perchlorate, the monitoring well is unreliable to detect just how much perchlorate is in the groundwater along with other contaminants. He says a new monitoring well should be installed at the location of the School House Mesa Well at the same time the old well is plugged and abandoned.

Mr. Gilkeson says, "The continuing explosions create craters that continuously fracture the ground. The craters are a collection point for rainfall to carry the poisonous soil contaminants into the shallow groundwater. The strongly sloping topography predicts that the groundwater flow is to the west toward the Rio Grande River. There is no groundwater monitoring well to the west of the explosion crater. The only monitoring well, the School House Mesa Well, is cross-gradient 3/4 of a mile away to the north."

Repeatedly performing the open detonations for decades on the same contaminated tract of land at Kirtland AFB causes the re-suspension of accumulated soil contamination into Albuquerque's air pathway.

The open detonations release other poisons to soil and air such as organic solvents, Hexavalent Chromium (Erin Brokovich), Arsenic, Lead, Mercury, Beryllium, Barium, Chromium, Selenium and radionuclides that are known to cause cancer, respiratory diseases, brain damage and fetal injury.

- Open detonations cause higher carbon monoxide emissions when Albuquerque is already exceeding carbon monoxide limits under the Clean Air Act.
- The annual amounts of particulate matter from open detonation is 20 times greater than for open burning;
- Nitrogen dioxide from open detonation is more than ten times greater than open burning.
- Open detonation for hydrogen sulfide is at the maximum allowable amount by New Mexico's ambient air standard.