



# Wrong Military Waste Sent to WIPP

CARLSBAD, New Mexico — Shipments from Idaho to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP) in New Mexico were temporarily halted when the New Mexico Environment Department (NMED) demanded on August 3 that the U.S. DOE remove a barrel of high-level radioactive waste that held liquids.

No liquids are allowed in WIPP's salt-bed chambers where barrels are expected to corrode over time. Liquid waste would hasten contamination of the area and the groundwater.

WIPP is the dumping ground for all U.S. H-bomb-related plutonium and plutonium-contaminated waste. The wrong drum arrived from the Advanced Mixed Waste Treatment Project at the Idaho National Laboratory in June — after Bechtel Corp. workers misread its label.

The DOE wanted to leave the illegal drum and claimed that the three-fourths-of-a-cup of liquid contained in the barrel posed no danger to the site and that removal of the container

created more safety risks than leaving it in place. The drum arrived in Carlsbad June 27, and the DOE informed New Mexico of the error on July 17. The barrel was 36 rows back in its deep underground vault by then, as the WIPP site receives on average 25 shipments each week. The removal process took several weeks.

New Mexico appears firm about holding the DOE to strict standards under WIPP's state permit. A press release signed by Ron Curry, Secretary of the state Environment Department, said, "I hope this decision sends a message to DOE that the State of New Mexico is serious about compliance with our regulations. WIPP's permit is specifically designed to protect the health and environment of New Mexicans for generations. We have a zero tolerance policy for mistakes like these and we expect DOE officials, including those in Idaho, to quickly correct this pattern of error."

Curry pointed out that while NMED has cited DOE in the past for issues related to improperly characterized waste, this is the first time NMED has documented the actual disposal of

waste containing prohibited items in the repository. NMED may issue monetary penalties.

WIPP is currently receiving plutonium waste shipments from the DOE's Savannah River, Los Alamos and Hanford sites. Shipments from Idaho have resumed. — *BLU*

## Failed Concrete Chernobyl Cover to be Re-covered in Steel

KIEV, Ukraine — The French engineering firm Novarka has been selected to build a new protective cover over the destroyed reactor at Chernobyl, sight of the world's worst radiation catastrophe. After the 1986 disaster, that according to the EPA, contaminated the whole of the Northern Hemisphere, a Russian-designed sarcophagus was hurriedly built over the wreck. The hope was to keep rain water away from the radioactive materials still inside, but the 21-year-old shell has cracked and leaked for years. The new cover-up company was chosen by the Assembly of Chernobyl Shelter Fund Donors which is comprised of representatives from 23 countries and run by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. The shelter is expected to cost \$1.2 billion, of which \$500 million was awarded August 7. Novarka plans to build a 20,000-ton steel vault away from the site, then slide it into place and seal the wreckage. Novarka claims its steel cover will last for 100 years.

## Contamination of W. Chicago by Kerr-McGee Disclosed

WEST CHICAGO, Illinois — Residential properties in this Chicago suburb may contain thorium from a defunct Kerr-McGee factory. The site which closed in 1973, produced thorium for gas lamp mantles. Sandy Riess has lived in a house 200 yards away from the former factory for two years and pushed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to examine her property after the death of her two dogs. The dogs died from bone cancer within six days of each other. A Geiger counter recently confirmed radiation levels in the basement to be 50 times higher than the federal government's allowable amount. Bricks from Riess' basement are being analyzed for thorium contamination.

Kerr-McGee began cleaning up around the site in the 1980s. One hundred and seventeen properties were found to be contaminated. Several were purchased by Kerr-McGee. In 1994, the EPA ordered another clean-up, and Riess' current home was one of 94 properties that had contaminated topsoil removed. Riess did not know of the possibility of thorium contamination until she learned that the lot behind her house had been purchased by Kerr-McGee and independently researched the area's history. Thorium is a carcinogenic known to concentrate in the bones. — *JH*

## Cold War Still Being Funded as Veterans Face Cuts

The Bush administration has proposed a record \$622 billion military budget for fiscal year 2008. The White House simultaneously wants to continue cutting veterans benefits. A total of \$141 billion is proposed just for the wars and occupations of Iraq and Afghanistan for 2008.

Together with funds already allocated this year the new request raises spending for the government's two wars to \$163 billion. Looked at in the short-term the Iraq and Afghanistan wars are set to cost \$446 million a day, \$18.6 million an hour, or \$310,000 every minute.

Of about \$140 billion in weapons programs, "Far too many of these programs have outlived their rationale" the *New York Times* editorialized. Even the pro-war *Times* declared, "What [this country] cannot afford are costly jobs programs disguised as defense and the wasteful weapons products promoted by an army of well-connected Washington lobbyists."

Needless programs — intended to foil the vanished USSR — that should be cancelled outright include: the Air Force's \$4.6 billion F-22 stealth fighter; the Marine Corps' \$2.6 billion tilt-wing V-22 Osprey; the Navy's \$3 billion stealth destroyer and \$2.5 billion attack submarine; and the Space Command's \$15.9 billion slated for outer space weapons and so-called missile defense.

In 2006 Mr. Bush proposed about \$1 billion in cuts in the \$28.7 billion Veteran's Affairs budget. Bush's proposal:

- Drastically cut financial support for up to 80 percent of the veterans in the nation's 129 state-run homes.
- Let the VA reduce the number of nursing-home beds from the 13,391 required by law.
- Put a hold on \$104 million in grants slated to rehabilitate and build new state veterans' homes.

### Total Appropriated Funds for Veterans in the Bush White House Proposals

(Budget authority in billions of dollars)

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	Total 2007-11
Proposed budget request	36.1	34.4	34.1	33.4	33.6	171.6
Current services level	34.3	35.2	36.3	37.3	38.4	181.6
Amount above/below current services	+1.8	-0.9	-2.2	-3.9	-4.8	-10.0

Source: House Budget Committee

### Afghanistan Chronicle

## U.S. Military "Causing Most Civilian Deaths & Injuries"

By John LaForge

I carry a big placard to protests which makes people cringe. Heavy, oversized letters blare, "It's Not War, It's Bloody Murder," and it has a dozen enlarged headlines about civilians killed by U.S. military actions.

News of civilians routinely being killed by U.S. forces in Afghanistan is hardly mentioned in polite company, although the country's hand-picked president, Hamid Karzai, has complained about the killings bitterly.

In late June, a group of 100 Afghan and Western aid agencies charged that at least 1,500 civilians had been killed by U.S. attacks in the last 17 months. The actual number of civilian deaths is probably higher because verification is too dangerous in Helmand, the area of heaviest fighting, and many deaths go unreported.

A day later, President Karzai called U.S. airstrikes "careless," and complained that "Afghan life is not cheap and should not be treated as such." In May — after a provincial official said 50 civilians were killed by U.S. bombings of villages in the Serkoh Valley — Karzai declared that Afghanis could no longer tolerate casualties that were the result of indiscriminate or excessive force.

One British military commander has even urged U.S. Special Forces to leave his area, complaining that U.S. bombings killed 31 nomads west of Kandahar in November 2006 and another 57 villagers, half of them women and children, in western Afghanistan in April 2007. On condition of anonymity, the commander told the August 9 *New York Times* that he thought U.S. Special Forces were "causing most of the civilian deaths and injuries" in his area.

The papers still say today's protests against U.S. wars are "vaguely reminiscent of the 60s," and it's the military that is again bombing tiny civilian hamlets using giant warplanes. The repeated and indiscriminate attacks have shocked and angered Afghanis who have taken to rioting and flag burning in response to the massacres.

"The Americans are killing, destroying a village, just in pursuit of one person," said Mahmudullah, an Afghan, referring to Osama bin Laden. "So now we have understood that Americans are a curse on us, and they are here just to destroy Afghanistan. They can tell the difference between men and women, children and animals, but they are just killing everyone."

These reports, all from the *New York Times*, cover only the spring and summer, with the dates the news appeared:

### Eighteen Civilians Wounded by U.S. Bombing

August 4 — Dr. Rahmatullah of the provincial hospital in Lashkar Gah, said at least 18 severely wounded civilians were being treated after the U.S. launched an airstrike on the Baghran district of southern Afghanistan.

### Airstrikes Kill At Least 30, Perhaps 45 Civilians

July 1 & 2 — Regional government and police officials said 62 insurgents and 45 civilians had been killed during U.S.-led airstrikes in the Grishk district of southern Afghanistan "where dozens of civilians died under similar circumstances last week."

Some witnesses painted an even grislier picture. Haji Zahir, a tribal elder reported, "They told me that they had buried 170 bodies."

### NATO Bombing Kills at Least 10 Civilians

June 25 — NATO officials admitted that its bombing and helicopter fire caused the deaths of at least 10 Pakistani civilians. NATO troops had accidentally crossed the Afghan/Pakistan border chasing Taliban fighters and had called down the airstrikes.

### Seven Children Killed By U.S./NATO Airstrikes

June 19 — Seven children were killed during an airstrike by U.S. jets against a religious compound in Paktika Province in eastern Afghanistan near the Pakistani border, a U.S. Army Major said. Afghan officials said June 18 that more than 50 civilians may have been killed during three days of fighting between NATO and the Taliban in the Chora district of the southern province of Uruzgan.

### Up to 60 Civilians Drowned by U.S.-Led Airstrike

June 6 — A boat carrying about 60 people was fired on by NATO helicopters and sunk Saturday, June 2, killing about 60 people. There were conflicting reports as to whether those aboard had been civilians.

### NATO Gunfire Wounded Five Civilians

May 17 — Local residents said NATO soldiers shot and wounded five civilians as they drove through Kandahar in southern Afghanistan.

### Civilian Toll Much Higher Than Reported

May 11 — Residents complained that the death toll of civilians killed May 8 was much higher than the official figure of 21

and is as high as 80. Gen. Dan McNeill, commander of NATO in Afghanistan, admitted to National Public Radio, "It does appear there were civilian casualties — exactly what caused them, we're working our way through all that."

### Airstrikes Kill 21 Civilians

May 10 & 13 — Less than a day after U.S. officials apologized publicly to Afghan President Karzai for a March incident near Jalalabad in which 19 civilians were shot by Marines in eastern Afghanistan, reports surfaced of at least 21 civilians killed in an airstrike in Helmand Province, though local residents said the death toll was about 80.

### U.S. Apologizes and Pays \$2,000 Per Civilian Killed

May 9 — Army brigade commander Col. John Nicholson apologized and paid compensation today for civilians killed by marines March 4. "We made official apologies on the part of the U.S. government" Nicholson said. The U.S. paid \$2,000 for each death.

### Huge Bombs Kill Up to 57 Civilians

May 1, 4 & 9 — Afghan officials said between 42 and 57 civilians, including women and children, were killed and 50 wounded in a series of airstrikes in three villages including Parmakan, south of Herat in the Zerkoh Valley of western Afghanistan.

The dead included 17 children under 10, 10 women and 14 old men, Hajji Daulat Khan told the *New York Times*. Hundreds of angry villagers protested in Shindand April 29.

The Air Force said a U.S. B-1 bomber dropped one 2,000-pound and several 500-pound bombs "on an enemy firing position." Warplanes also strafed and dropped 500-pound bombs on sites near Shindand. Dozens of women and children drowned trying to cross a chest-high river to escape the bombing.

### 16 Civilians Die as U.S. Troops Fire on Afghan Road

March 5 — "American troops opened fire on a highway filled with civilian cars and bystanders on Sunday," U.S. and Afghan officials said. In Jalalabad, "a stone-throwing riot in which hundreds of protesters, claiming that U.S. troops fired indiscriminately on civilians, shouted slogans denouncing the United States..." The U.S. military initially reported 34 civilians killed and 24 wounded.

One witness, Tur Gul, said, "They opened fire on everybody, the ones inside the vehicles and the ones on foot."