

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

September 28, 2022

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New Report Exposes Toxic Dangers at US Military Facility in Virginia

The Radford Arsenal's Open Burning and Incineration of Hazardous Wastes Near Homes & Schools

RADFORD, VA – Today, Citizens for Arsenal Accountability, the Center for Progressive Reform and Earthjustice released [*An Explosive Problem: The Radford Arsenal's Toxic Operations*](#), a report on the US military's continued use of open burning and incineration of hazardous wastes at Radford Army Ammunition Plant (RAAP). The report compiles a troubling history of RAAP's frequent violations of essential laws and highlights the risks that burning hazardous wastes poses to nearby communities.

Over the last 80 years, RAAP has released millions of pounds of extremely dangerous and harmful toxins like lead and heavy metals. Given the increased recognition of the health hazards caused by open burning in military operations overseas, it is astonishing that the US military continues to use such a dangerous practice in Virginia, especially with 11 day-care centers, eight elementary schools and three nursing homes full of particularly vulnerable people within a six-mile radius of the facility.

"Our research has documented a disturbing pattern of serious regulatory violations, dangerous workplace incidents, and harmful releases to the environment at the Radford Arsenal," said Earthjustice Senior Research & Policy Analyst Lisa Fuhrmann. "This troubling timeline raises serious questions and concerns about RAAP's operations, especially because it is located so close to homes and schools."

As the worst polluter in Virginia since 2001, RAAP is exactly the kind of facility in dire need of strong regulatory oversight, and yet to-date, Virginia's Department of Environmental Quality (VDEQ) has continued to approve permits for extremely dangerous activities that endanger local communities. Last year, VDEQ renewed two permits allowing the Radford Arsenal to keep burning hazardous waste—including into the open air—for another decade.

"Air and water pollution from the Radford Army Ammunition Plant are harming nearby communities," said M. Isabelle Chaudry, a senior policy analyst at the Center for Progressive Reform. "Elevated levels of arsenic, lead, cadmium, and other toxic substances in open burn emissions put residents—particularly children and older people—at risk for serious health problems. These include developmental disabilities and cancer. Indeed, the City of Radford already has a 13 percent higher cancer rate than the state overall."

The report recommends that VDEQ and RAAP take action to provide nearby communities with greater transparency and opportunities for community involvement. It emphasizes the need to end open burning and calls for a third-party alternatives assessment to be conducted so that the most environmentally and health protective technology can be implemented at the facility. It also calls for VDEQ to strengthen its regulatory oversight and require RAAP to take affirmative steps to make sure that violations do not continue to occur. It calls on Virginia legislators to allocate funding for a community health assessment and a cumulative hazard assessment. Combined, these recommendations provide a straightforward path to improve oversight and strengthen protections for nearby communities.

“We cannot keep relying on outdated technology to dispose of hazardous waste and toxic chemicals,” said Citizens for Arsenal Accountability Co-Founder and Co-Chair Alyssa Carpenter. “We require the safest, most advanced technology to safeguard our community against toxic pollution.”

Citizens for Arsenal Accountability is a community organization comprised of citizens in Southwest Virginia that advocates to stop the open burning of toxic munitions and eliminate pollution produced by the Radford Army Ammunition Plant to ensure clean air, water, and soil for the New River Valley.

Earthjustice’s Community Partnerships Program (CPP) provides legal and advocacy resources to local leaders demanding a safe, just, and healthy environment in which their communities can thrive – no matter how long the fight. CPP works hand-in-hand with frontline communities to remove environmental hazards and secure access to environmental benefits

The Center for Progressive Reform harnesses the power of law and public policy to create a responsive government, a healthy environment, and a just society.