



News Release

BYRON L. DORGAN
CHAIRMAN

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FOR MORE INFORMATION:
CONTACT: Barry E. Piatt
PHONE: 202-224-0577

DORGAN SAYS ARMY, VA POLICY CHANGES IN RESPONSE TO DEADLY CHEMICAL EXPOSURE OF TROOPS IN IRAQ WILL SAVE LIVES

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) --- The U.S. Army is ramping up its response to the exposure of U.S. troops in Iraq to the deadly chemical sodium dichromate, U.S. Senator Byron Dorgan (D-ND) said Friday. He said it has also doubled the Army estimate of the number of U.S. troops who may have been exposed to the cancer-causing chemical from 347 to more than 1,164.

Dorgan said the Department of Veterans Affairs is also stepping up its effort to respond to the exposures to better monitor and treat exposed soldiers.

"These are significant breakthroughs," Dorgan said Friday. "Lives will be saved because of these actions."

As Chairman of the Senate Democratic Policy Committee (DPC), Dorgan chaired hearings on the exposure, and the Army's response in June 2008 and August 2009. Multiple failures by the contractor, KBR, were revealed at the 2008 hearing. The hearing in August focused on the Army's response to the exposure and its failure to adequately monitor, test, and notify soldiers who may have been exposed of the health risks they may now face. Dorgan has been pushing the Army, and the Department of Veterans Affairs to launch a more vigorous effort to reach, warn, monitor and treat soldiers who may have been exposed to the chemical at the Qarmat Ali water treatment facility in 2003.

Dorgan released a letter Friday from Army Secretary Pete Geren who said the Army is now working to track down and notify all 1,164 exposed soldiers to alert them to the health risk they now face. Geren told Dorgan the Army is now working more closely with the Department of Veterans Affairs to ensure that VA health professionals know to be looking for sodium dichromate exposure symptoms and how to treat them.

Dorgan also released a letter from Secretary of Veterans Affairs (VA) Eric Shinseki informing him that the VA is stepping up its response to the exposure. Shinseki wrote that the VA is now offering veterans who were at the site free medical monitoring and treatment. Previously, soldiers exhibiting symptoms consistent with sodium dichromate had to prove their conditions were service connected. That burden of proof, which the VA has lifted, often delayed or prevented treatment for illnesses for which prompt and urgent treatment often means the difference between life and death.

National Guard troops from West Virginia, Oregon, South Carolina, Indiana and members of the Army's 3rd Infantry Division were among those at the Qarmat Ali site who were exposed to the deadly chemical.

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