

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

April 20, 2009

The Honorable Brad Miller  
Chairman  
House Committee on Science and Technology  
Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight  
2321 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Miller:

We write to thank you for your tireless efforts to protect the health and well-being of U.S. citizens, and to respectfully ask that the Subcommittee, perhaps jointly with the House Committee on Natural Resources, hold one or more field hearings in Puerto Rico regarding the issue of Vieques in the coming months. Residents of Vieques have high rates of disease compared to the people on the main island of Puerto Rico. Studies have shown heavy metals and other contaminants in the soil, plants and shellfish in Vieques. The link between the U.S. military's use of Vieques for many decades and the health problems currently being experienced by the island's residents have been the subject of substantial debate in recent years. It is a subject that is of deep interest—and concern—to both of us.

The Environmental Protection Agency listed Vieques on its National Priorities List (NPL) in February 2005 at the request of the Governor of Puerto Rico. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is responsible for performing public health assessments at sites listed on the NPL. The ATSDR performed four public health assessments in Vieques from 2001 to 2003 in response to public petitions. These assessments examined four potential "pathways" through which human exposure to contamination might occur, including (1) ambient air; (2) soil; (3) drinking water supplies and groundwater; and (4) consumption of fish and shellfish. In each instance, the ATSDR concluded that there was "No Apparent Public Health Hazard" resulting from human exposure to contamination from the Navy's former activities through each of these pathways. To put this finding in context, the ATSDR has established five categories of public health hazard findings, ranging from "No Public Health Hazard" to "Urgent Public Health Hazard." The "No Public Health Hazard" finding is defined by the registry as "A category used in ATSDR's public health assessments for sites where human exposure to contaminated media might be occurring, might have occurred in the past, or might occur in the future, but where the exposure is not expected to cause any harmful health effects."

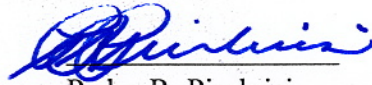
As observed during this Subcommittee's March 12, 2009 hearing, other non-ATSDR studies have called the ATSDR's conclusions regarding Vieques into question, asserting a more definitive link between the Navy's past activities and the health problems being experienced by the island's residents. For this reason, we believe that a field hearing will help Congress to understand the public health issues in Vieques and to fairly assess whether the ATSDR conducted itself in appropriate fashion in this particular case. This, in turn, will enable Congress to draw some broader conclusions about the agency and to redress any deficiencies that may be revealed. Members of this subcommittee will have the opportunity during the field hearing to hear from residents of Vieques, from authors of non-ATSDR studies, and from ATSDR officials themselves.

We thank you for your consideration of this request and we look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,



Alan Grayson  
Member of Congress



Pedro R. Pierluisi  
Member of Congress