

OREGON TROOPS MAY HAVE BEEN EXPOSED TO TOXICS

Oregon National Guard Soldiers serving in Iraq may have been exposed to a toxic chemical, according to a U.S. senator investigating the exposure of hundreds of troops to the carcinogen while they were protecting a water pumping plant in 2003.

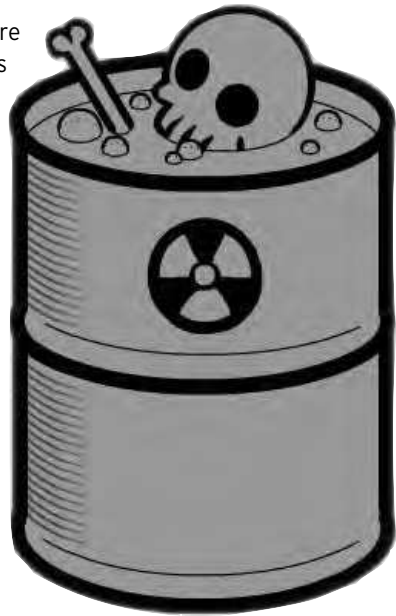
"There may have been some guardsmen or women from Oregon on the site that were exposed as well; we need to get to the bottom of that," Sen. Evan Bayh, D-Indiana, told MSNBC Jan. 5.

Bayh said the troops, including more than 100 from Indiana, were exposed to highly toxic hexavalent chromium, used as an anti-corrosive agent. "There were piles of this stuff, big orange piles. It created dust storms there was so much of it lying around," Bayh said on MSNBC's *Rachel Maddow Show*.

Last month 16 Indiana National Guard soldiers sued KBR, the contractor responsible for repairing the Qarmat Ali plant, alleging the company knew about the toxin but failed to warn or protect the troops from the carcinogen, according to press reports. KBR denied liability. KBR is the former subsidiary of Halliburton, the corporation that Vice President Dick Cheney ran before taking office.

The lawsuit alleged that the exposure may have caused nasal tumors in soldiers and perhaps one death already. The toxin is the same chemical made famous by the movie *Erin Brockovich*, about a town in California exposed to the carcinogen.

The U.S. Army has denied the troops were endangered by the exposure. But Bayh called for an investigation similar to the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam, a toxin that the Army denied for decades had hurt its soldiers. Type II diabetes and a long list of other chronic illnesses have been linked to Agent Orange exposure, according to the Veterans Administration, and may qualify vets for disability payments. — Alan Pittman



WOPR GETS YEAR-END PUSH

The BLM decided on New Year's Eve to push through with the Western Oregon Plan Revisions (WOPR) despite concerns from Gov. Ted Kulongoski and the Environmental Protection Agency about endangered species protection and clean water as well the comments from thousands of concerned citizens and environmental groups. The WOPR would dramatically increase logging on over two million acres of Oregon's public lands, including lands around Eugene.

While disappointed, conservationists say they are still confident the WOPR can be stopped, either by the incoming Obama administration or through the courts. Doug Heiken of Oregon Wild, one of the groups that voiced opposition to the plan throughout the process, says "the last minute approval of the WOPR appears to be a parting gift from the Bush administration to the timber industry — like a big old-growth clearcut with a red ribbon tied around it."

The timber industry has also expressed reservations about the WOPR, saying that BLM is protecting too much land. "More, rather than less, harvesting is needed to properly manage our federal forests," according to the American Forest Resources Council. The AFRC also criticized the plan for not creating more jobs. "With Oregon facing unemployment already over 7 percent and a billion dollar budget deficit, this plan should have done more to sustain forest health, jobs and the welfare of our rural communities," says AFRC's Tom Partin.

Heiken disagrees: "The timber industry claims they want to help create jobs, but we can put thousands of people to work doing watershed restoration work instead of clearcutting," he says.

According to Heiken, "The timber industry appears to be in denial about their role in the economic crisis. Just like the housing and lending industries, the timber industry got too big for their britches."

He says that the timber industry and the economy can benefit from forest conservation. Of Lane County's recent discussions of using the forests for cap and trade carbon sequestration, he says that while he hopes "there will be widespread public recognition of the need to conserve forests to help mitigate climate change," he is "skeptical that federal forests will be included in any market-based carbon trading scheme." According to Heiken, "the county should be working toward a political solution, not a market solution."

— Camilla Mortensen

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



news Briefs

UO FOOTBALL TRAILS ON SAT SCORES

UO football players SAT scores average 147 points lower than the average SAT scores of other UO students, according to an investigative report by the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

The average SAT score at the UO is 1,100, but the average score for football players is 953, according to the latest NCAA reports studied by the *AJC*. The UO's average football SAT score ranked 17th among the 54 biggest college football programs studied by the newspaper.

By comparison the football average at OSU on the 1,600-point SAT was 997, or 88 points less than the OSU student average.

"Critics say athletes who arrive on campus unprepared to compete academically get shuffled off to easy majors and unchallenging courses and don't receive much of an education," the *AJC* reported.

A recent investigation by *USA Today* found that the UO has an "extreme" concentration of men's football and basketball players majoring in political science. The UO's political science program allows "self-directed" courses, which have been a subject of athletic department abuse at other universities.

Critics also charged that lower admission standards for football players unfairly take class spots from more qualified students.

Big football SAT gaps "call into question the lengths to which schools will go to win," the *AJC* reported. The paper wrote, "Five of the last seven public universities to win college football's national championship ranked among the study's bottom 20 in football SAT scores." — Alan Pittman

NORMA GRIER STEPS DOWN

Executive Director Norma Grier of the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides (NCAP) retired at the end of 2009, but she will stay on as a consultant for the first six months of 2009 while the organization transitions to a new executive director, according to NCAP's Communications Coordinator Aria Seligmann.



NCAP'S Norma Grier

NCAP works on pesticide reform programs in Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon and California, and for 27 years published national magazines including *The Journal of Pesticide Reform*.

Grier was one of the initial founders of NCAP 31 years ago. She became interested in pesticide reform

while living in a forested watershed in Douglas County in the mid-1970s, says Seligmann. "During that time, Northwest lumber companies learned they could grow tree crops faster if they sprayed pesticides, and they used the same herbicide as those used in Agent Orange: a mixture of 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T. As more and more of Grier's neighbors fell ill, she became touched by their stories and decided she needed to do something about pesticide spraying. She has been working on pesticide reform ever since."

Grier's three decades of pesticide reform work chronicle the story of pesticide use in the Northwest, as well as its reduction. More information is available at www.pesticide.org