

Frank Vera III

Phone:

Fax:

June 17, 2003

Certified Mail
7002 2410 0003 7386 3268
Return Receipt Requested

Secretary of the Air Force
Headquarters, US Air Force
11 CS/SCSR (FOIA) 1000 Air Force, Pentagon
Washington, DC 20330-1000
Phone: 703-696-7263
Fax: 703-696-7273

Re: Freedom of Information Act Request

Dear Sir or Madam:

This is a request under the Freedom of Information Act.

I request the following document (or documents pertaining to the following) be provided to me:
A copy of the report "Burial of Radioactive Waste in the USAF", by Stencel, J. R., et al, RHL Report 72W-9, Mar. 72.

If the requested document (or documents) is not in your possession, please forward this request to the appropriate individual(s).

I request a waiver of all fees for this request, as disclosure of the requested information to me is in the public interest because it is likely to significantly contribute to public understanding of the operations or activities of the government.

I thank you for your consideration of my request.

Sincerely,

Frank Vera III

Attachment: "Air Force hunts for radioactive waste" dated, Tuesday, June 3, 2003, by Peter Waldman, The Wall Street Journal

Air Force hunts for radioactive waste
Tuesday, June 3, 2003
By Peter Waldman
The Wall Street Journal

The U.S. Air Force is investigating whether radioactive waste is buried at more than 80 former and current air bases across the country, including the site of a new federal prison in central California.

Air Force health experts believe the radioactive material, generated by nuclear-weapons maintenance in the 1950s and 1960s, poses "no immediate public health risk as long as these burial sites are not disturbed," according to the Air Force's written responses to questions posed by The Wall Street Journal. It is far from certain, however, that the sites are undisturbed: Many of the former bases were decommissioned and cleared for public use years ago.

For example, the \$100 million, maximum-security penitentiary in Atwater, Calif., east of San Francisco, occupies the former Castle Air Force Base, once part of the Cold War-era Strategic Air Command. The recently built prison is on a part of the base near where munitions were kept -- and where investigators from the Air Force Safety Center suspect nuclear weapons were maintained and stored.

The radiation investigation is one of several lingering environmental sores afflicting the Pentagon as it unloads dozens of military bases around the country. Since the radiological sites haven't been monitored in years, military officials aren't certain where such waste is buried and whether the dumping areas pose a danger. The matter has gained new urgency as the Air Force seeks to have more bases converted into parks, schools and other uses, potentially exposing more civilians to risk.

Burial of radiological waste in shallow trenches or sealed pipes was the "prescribed" disposal method in the 1950s and '60s, the Air Force said. It was assumed low levels of radioactivity wouldn't penetrate the soil cover. The buried materials included wipes, gloves, protective clothing and tape used to clean and maintain so-called unsealed nuclear weapons -- early devices in which the nuclear material was kept separate from the trigger. The Air Force said it lost track of the burial sites because of poor record keeping and is trying to identify and inspect the lands for safety concerns.

The Air Force said its real-estate managers learned about the buried waste a few years ago. But an internal Air Force survey from 1972, reviewed by The Wall Street Journal, indicates many of the radioactive dumps were well documented at least three decades ago. The report, entitled "Burial of Radioactive Waste in the USAF," named 46 bases where the service knew radioactive waste was buried, including Carswell in Fort Worth, Texas, and others on the list of 80 bases the Air Force may investigate. In most cases, the report recommended digging up the waste for proper disposal by licensed contractors. The report also recommended amending Air Force procedures on such sites, "to prevent their return to civilian control without some consideration of the radioactive contamination."

Last week, the Air Force told federal, state and local officials in California it will dispatch technical teams to the Castle site next week to brief officials there about possible radioactive waste. Teams also will re-evaluate buildings, at Castle and elsewhere, to be sure they still are suitable for public use, according to an Air Force fact sheet distributed in some local communities. Atwater and Merced County officials said no prison inmates are housed in former

base buildings, although the prison uses some old Castle facilities for storage and maintenance.

Some businesses occupying the former base sites were shocked to learn the Air Force is raising these questions now. In Plattsburgh, Nexia's chief executive officer, Jeffrey Turner, said he wasn't aware there was a radiological-waste probe. Daniel Wieneke, president and chief executive of Plattsburgh Airbase Redevelopment Corp., which operates the thriving industrial park on Lake Champlain, said.

In addition to the Castle and Plattsburgh bases, the Air Force plans on-site investigations at three other decommissioned installations: March Air Force Base in Riverside, Calif.; Pease Air Force Base in Portsmouth, N.H.; and Carswell Air Force Base in Fort Worth. The Air Force said it believes radiological material may be buried at the five sites, based on documents and interviews with retired personnel.

http://www.napanews.com/templates/index.cfm?template=story_full&id=97CE014B-5DF6-4C0D-B952-ACD69E71D283