

**THE ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION PROGRAM AT
THE SPRING VALLEY FORMERLY USED DEFENSE SITE**

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE AND
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**THE HONORABLE STEPHEN F. LYNCH, CHAIRMAN
THE HONORABLE JASON CHAFFETZ, RANKING MEMBER**



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**WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10, 2009
RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING
ROOM 2247**

Good afternoon, Chairman Lynch, Ranking Member Chaffetz, Congresswoman Norton, and members of the Committee. I am George Hawkins, Director of the District Department of the Environment (DDOE). Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony at this Oversight Hearing on the Environmental Restoration Program at the Spring Valley Formerly Used Defense Site. My objectives this afternoon are to describe, from our perspective, the manner in which the District Department of the Environment works in association with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to facilitate the ongoing planning and execution of work activities at Spring Valley. Furthermore, I would like to emphasize some of the recent and ongoing efforts that DDOE has established to foster and encourage communication pathways with District residents.

As you may know, the District of Columbia works to resolve this matter under a 1994 agreement with the Department of Defense. This agreement provides reimbursement to the District for providing technical review and guidance at Installation Restoration projects at both active military facilities and Formerly Used Defense Sites within the District of Columbia. Our goal under this review process is to ensure that restoration work is performed in compliance with District of Columbia environmental laws and regulations, and that the work is protective of the environment, and human health.

Currently our attention is mainly focused on three sites: the Washington Navy Yard, which is the only Superfund site in the District, Bolling Air Force Base, and of course, Spring Valley. The District's environmental program has been involved with the Spring Valley project since June 1995, when two Environmental Specialists were hired soon after a Record of Decision was

issued stating that “no further action” was needed at the Site. It was the work of these two District staff members that ultimately resulted in the Corps of Engineers returning to Spring Valley, and brought us to where we are today.

Since the Corps returned, we have been involved in a partnering process with them and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to ensure the highest quality of work is done to investigate and remediate the contaminants left behind by the Army after World War I in Spring Valley. The partners meet on a monthly basis, and no work is initiated unless, or until all three partners agree on how to proceed. If either the District or EPA, or both, disagrees with a proposed plan or procedure, the action will not occur.

Currently there are two major issues upon which our attention is focused: the ongoing groundwater study, and the planned on-site destruction of chemical weapons. We have been in discussions for some time concerning plans for the next phase of the groundwater investigation, and have recently come to an agreement on how this work will be accomplished. We expect that a new round of groundwater sampling will occur later this summer or in early fall.

The District is interested in the groundwater results for two reasons. The first is the obvious need to determine if contamination, particularly perchlorates, is potentially affecting the Dalecarlia reservoir, which supplies the drinking water to the entire District of Columbia. Even though sampling so far has indicated that the reservoir has not been affected, we have been concerned that perchlorate contamination may reach the deeper aquifer. For that reason, we have insisted that the Corps conduct deep well sampling. The second reason to continue groundwater sampling

is to hopefully assist in locating the source of the perchlorates that have been detected in the groundwater at high levels near the American University campus. Locating the source of perchlorates might help in locating a yet-to-be discovered burial pit that has been mentioned in some of the historical archives.

In response to the proposed on-site destruction of chemical weapons, DDOE has been briefed on the Corps of Engineers' conceptual plan for this activity. Based on the information that we have received to date, we believe that the Corps' proposal poses the least possible threat compared to the alternatives, and that it can be done in a manner that protects human safety and the environment. Clearly, the use of explosives for the on-site destruction of munitions requires the cooperation of several District agencies besides the Department of the Environment. The District's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA), Metropolitan Police Department, Fire Department and Health Department have all been briefed by the Corps of Engineers, and all agencies are currently reviewing the plans for this event. District Government sign-off on this plan will occur after reviews have been completed by all agencies. If any agency has concerns with the plan, then approval will not occur until all uncertainties have been satisfactorily addressed.

While these are the two major issues right now, there are several other efforts at Spring Valley which appear to be nearing completion. As the Corps comes close to completing the currently planned field work by the end of 2010, all of the partners are involved in deciding the criteria for determining when the site can be closed out. The issue of closure criteria was asked once before in 1995, and it was the District of Columbia's environmental program that determined that

additional work was necessary, and the Corp returned to Spring Valley. Since then, burial pits and chemical weapons have been found, tens of thousands of samples have been analyzed, scores of properties have been remediated, and additional scores of properties have been geophysically surveyed. Many of these properties have been dug up in the hopes of finding burial pits or single pieces of munitions.

Still more work remains to be done. The Spring Valley project is unique, it is complicated, and it is challenging. The Corps must continue to follow the protocols and procedures established in the National Contingency Plan, and we must use our best professional judgment every day, calling in other experts and specialists whenever necessary. Most importantly, we must ask the right questions and the tough questions. The District Department of the Environment asked the right and tough questions in 1995, and we continue to ask them today. We insist that the work will be performed completely, properly, and safely.

The Department of the Environment has pledged to continue to act as an aggressive environmental advocate for the citizens of Spring Valley. We have devoted many resources to the clean up of Spring Valley over the years. Currently we have a manager designated as DDOE's primary representative, as well as several staff who assist in reviewing planned activities, bringing specialized groundwater and hazardous waste experience to bear. We will also have a toxicologist on board in the next month who will bring additional, specialized expertise to our team.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of transparency and accountability. While we believe we have done an excellent job to ensure that the Corps' work at Spring Valley is conducted in the most protective manner, we have been approached by members of the community who seek improved communications by all parties. Restoration Advisory Board meetings are open to the public and this has been the policy since 2001. DDOE representatives have participated in each of these monthly meetings ever since the RAB's inception. In addition, we have attended every community meeting hosted by the Corps and have made ourselves available to respond to community questions and concerns.

Still, we agree that we can and should continue to raise the bar and be more proactive in our relations with the community. To that purpose, we have committed ourselves to hosting recurring meetings with the two Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners who represent Spring Valley, Nan Wells and Tom Smith. We have had two meetings so far, and while we limited the first meeting to those two individuals in order to focus on their specific questions about DDOE's role in Spring Valley, we have agreed to include others in subsequent meetings as special circumstances or concerns arise. Upon invitation by ANC Smith, DDOE recently participated in a successful Ward 3 Democratic Committee panel discussion on Spring Valley that was held on Earth Day, and are also in the process of adding information on Spring Valley to our DDOE Web Site to keep citizens better informed.

Chairman Lynch and members of the Committee, I wish to thank you once again for the opportunity to testify, and I look forward to answering any questions the Committee may have.

George S. Hawkins, Esq.

Director's Biography

George S. Hawkins is the director of the District Department of the Environment, an \$80 million dollar agency with 300 employees. DDOE performs city, county and state environmental functions for the nation's capital.

DDOE is responsible for providing energy assistance to District residents; reviewing development applications for compliance with environmental requirements; monitoring and enforcing air and water quality standards; regulating the use and disposal of toxic substances; preserving the District's natural habitat for fish and wildlife; and developing and implementing stormwater management regulations to minimize runoff pollution into District waterways.



One of the Fenty Administration's top priorities is the restoration of the Anacostia River. In keeping with this goal, Hawkins is implementing plans to transform one of the most polluted rivers in the country into an environmental gem that will drive economic revitalization in the communities surrounding it.

As director of DDOE, Hawkins has led the District's efforts in reducing childhood exposure to lead hazards. He negotiated, and now oversees, the implementation of, the nation's most stringent federal permit to reduce pollutants from stormwater runoff. He manages the nation's most successful low-income energy assistance program, including energy conservation and home weatherization. He launched and chairs the Mayor's Green Team, which coordinates the District Government's internal sustainability program across more than 40 agencies. Most recently, Hawkins launched the Mayor's Green Summer Job Corps, a group of several hundred District youth who spent the summer of 2008 engaged in environmental cleanups and public education.

George serves as the Chair of the Green Building Advisory Council, which oversees the implementation of the nation's most progressive green building law. He is a member of the Mayor's Green Collar Jobs Advisory Committee, and a board member of the DC Water and Sewer Authority (WASA).

Prior to coming to the District, Hawkins was executive director of New Jersey Future, a non-profit organization which, under his leadership, came to be recognized as the state's foremost advocacy group promoting smart growth. While there, George worked with Governor Jon Corzine's office to focus development on transit stations and urban areas. Hawkins also previously served as Executive Director of the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association and held senior positions with the US Environmental Protection Agency, including Senior Assistant Regional Counsel and Special Assistant to the Regional Administrator. He served Vice President Gore on the National Performance Review, playing an integral role in streamlining and strengthening environmental protection programs at USEPA and OSHA.

George began his career practicing law for the Boston firm Ropes & Gray, and is a member of the Bar in Massachusetts and the District of Columbia. George graduated summa cum laude from Princeton University in 1983 and cum laude from Harvard Law School in 1987. Since 1999, George has taught Environmental Law and Policy for the Princeton Environment Institute at Princeton University. George and his wife Tamara have two children.