

Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service and the District of Columbia
Testimony of Cornelius M. Kerwin, President of American University
June 10, 2009

My name is Cornelius Kerwin. I have been president of American University for the past four years -- serving as interim president from August 2005 to July 2007 and president from July 2007 until present. I have been a member of the AU community for 40 years. We appreciate your ongoing interest in this project, to ensure the safety and well being of everyone in northwest Washington, D.C.

American University participated in hearings on the Army Corps project that were held on July 27, 2001 by the House Subcommittee on the District of Columbia. At that time, we provided a substantial number of historical documents and communications dating from 1917 through 2001 on the use of our campus by the U.S. Government and the U.S. Army. This compendium is a valuable resource of project background and information provided by American University – which was one of perhaps 10 properties in Spring Valley used by the U.S. Government in a patriotic effort to support our nation during wartime.

Fundamental to our actions and position on these matters are overarching truths:

- American University did not produce, test, bury nor conceal these chemicals or munitions.
- The war materiel produced, tested, and buried around Spring Valley and American University was the work of and belongs to the U.S. Government and the U.S. Army.
- The responsibility to locate and safely remove these items and restore the land is the responsibility of the U.S. Government, U.S. Army, and the Army Corps of Engineers.
- American University has made available all information germane to the Army Corps cleanup.

The university has endured years of dislocation, suspended operations, business interruption, un-reimbursed costs in the millions of dollars, and periodic safety concerns as the Army Corps has conducted its multi-year effort to find and remove all items from that era.

It has been our consistent position to act with an abundance of caution to ensure the safety of all. Senior members of the university have been assigned to work with the Army Corps and monitor their activity. We have hired outside expertise to independently assess the Army Corps work to fully protect our campus and ensure the safety of the surrounding area.

To assess risk, we hired Dr. Paul Chrostowski almost 10 years ago as an advisor to the university to review the recommendations and work performed by the Army Corps and their contractors. He is an environmental engineer, applied toxicologist, and chemist whose expertise has benefited the university and surrounding community -- on matters ranging from establishing a stringent arsenic clean up standard to recommending additional safety measures on the Army Corps containment structure on Glenbrook Road.

AU's ongoing information sharing efforts have expanded over the past 20 years, and have included campus memos, open meetings, news articles, materials posted electronically, and historical documents in the library archives. A university Web-site devoted to the Army Corps activity has been an information resource with links and helpful information. The site includes more than 80 communications and project updates since Year 2000.

As risks have warranted, we have targeted specific populations with pertinent information and taken additional measures over the last 10 years, such as:

- Hosting forums, meetings, and discussions;
- Instructing workers, faculty and students how to shelter-in-place;
- Suspending operations on a high-use athletics field for two years;
- Shutting down our Child Development Center (daycare) building for nine years;
- Testing defined campus populations for arsenic poisoning.

These are only a few examples. Every outreach has been done based on the nature of a particular situation and the potential risk at hand. A “high probability” occurrence might require a rapid response and specific safety protocols while a “low probability” occurrence might prompt a general sharing of information.

AU’s archives are open and accessible to anyone and have been used extensively by journalists, government agencies, and community members to learn about the history of these activities in northwest Washington.

The only archive documents not publicly available are the Board of Trustees materials that deal with American University as a private corporation and include confidential information relating to governance, personnel matters, third-party and financial information.

To respond to questions whether these private records might contain pertinent information -- in April 2005, AU counsel made these records available to independent parties from the Environmental Protection Agency. They reviewed trustee minutes and information from that period and agreed there was no information included that might help the Corps to locate additional burial sites or assist in the clean-up and remediation. This was reported to the Restoration Advisory Board in May 2005, and to the partnering meeting

(including representatives from the EPA, Army Corps, AU, and the DC Department of Health).

We thank you for your help to ensure that the affected areas in northwest Washington are completely cleaned of all World War I debris and byproducts and are fully and safely restored.

We will do all we can to assist.