

**Testimony  
of  
Nan S. Wells  
ANC Commissioner 3D03  
Committee on Oversight and Government Reform  
Subcommittee on Federal Work, Postal Service, and District of Columbia  
Washington, DC  
June 10, 2009**

I want to thank Representative Norton for organizing the hearing today. Her leadership on behalf of the Spring Valley residents has been crucial in presenting their concerns and making certain that the cleanup is thorough and complete before the Army Corps of Engineers leaves the area again.

My comments today will be brief. As the ANC Commissioner for a large part of Spring Valley, I have joined with my fellow Commissioner Tom Smith in working with the local and federal officials responsible for the ongoing effort to remove WWI munitions, chemical weapons, and other contamination from the community in which we live.

The project schedule which is attached to my testimony indicates that the Army plans to finish most of its active investigations in Fiscal Year 2010, which begins October 1, 2009, and ends September 30, 2010. In Fiscal Year 2011, the Army would complete reports on the status of the cleanup. However, there remain serious questions regarding the location of additional areas that need investigation and the level of the remaining contamination.

There is considerable concern that the Army plans to end the active investigations before the final reports that contain the required information on the cleanup are completed and reviewed by independent experts to verify the accuracy and thoroughness of the effort. Project activities have also been limited by insufficient funding.

**In order to successfully complete the project, we need the following:**

- 1. Independent and expert review of the project's methods and data by the National Academy of Sciences (NAS).**
- 2. Additional funding sufficient to complete the necessary investigations and the remediation activities.**
- 3. Disclosure of all relevant environmental data to the public.**
- 4. Increased transparency, accountability, accountability, and oversight from all of the participating agencies, and involved institutions, including the DC Department of the Environment (DDOE), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Army Corps, and American University.**

The Army began the cleanup of the Spring Valley area 16 years ago. Although some of the activities that took place at the American University Experiment Station (AUES) had been documented in the records of institutions and agencies, there was no organized exploration of the extent of the contamination until the accidental discovery of munitions and chemical filled weapons on January 5, 1993.

There is evidence, however, that the Army Corps and American University knew, at least as early as 1986, that there were “possible burial sites.” The AUES site and operations were extensive. Camp Leach activities were said to involve as many as 100,000 soldiers and 1,200 chemists and engineers. It has been described as “the world’s second-largest poison gas facility in 1917 and 1918.”

In 1995, after two years of investigation, the Army Corps issued a report describing the results of their work and declaring Spring Valley “safe.” They indicated that no further investigation was required. This conclusion was contested by the DC Department of Health and thanks to dedicated professionals in the department, the large toxic sites on Glenbrook Road were located in 1998.

However, when the contractor building a house next to the site withdrew permission for access to his property, the Army withdrew in 2002, and left the site unfinished. Excavation of this heavily contaminated site on Glenbrook was finally begun again in 2007. The investigation and remediation are expected to be completed in 2009. Given the history of the unfinished investigations at this project, however, it is very important to make certain that when the Army leaves Spring Valley again, the cleanup will be both thorough and complete.

There is also concern about the Army’s plans to destroy chemical munitions in the neighborhood in July of this year. Although the Army has destroyed munitions using the same technology before, this will be the first time the process will be used to destroy explosively configured munitions that could release arsine gas, a highly toxic chemical for which there is no antidote. The Army currently plans to destroy the munitions and neutralize the chemicals close to Sibley hospital and Grand Oaks retirement residence, near the DC reservoir, and next to a Spring Valley residential neighborhood. We have urged that the destruction be undertaken at a federal facility of which there are many in DC and the surrounding area.

On the one hand, we continue to be told that the storage and destruction of these materials are so safe that the process can take place near a hospital, the reservoir, and a residential neighborhood. However, we are then told that the materials are so dangerous that we cannot know what they are. This inconsistency does not inspire confidence. In 2007, I asked for a report on the results of the investigations carried out on Glenbrook Road from 1999 to 2002. I was told that the report had not been completed, and therefore, could not be released. It is still not available.

Ground water monitoring is critically important both in determining levels of contamination and locating potential sites of contamination. The project has installed a number of ground water monitoring wells around the reservoir and the university. However, ground water in the wells has not been tested since 2007. There are plans to test the wells in 2009, but it is June and to date, no testing has been done. Additional groundwater wells are scheduled to be installed this year in order to determine the flow of groundwater in the community. However no regular schedule for testing has been set.

Too much of the information on the contamination discovered thus far has been restricted, often for reasons that do not make sense. National security is frequently cited as the reason that data and other information cannot be shared. We are told that the information would be useful to terrorists.

When I first began attending the meetings of the “Partnering Group”, which is composed of representatives for the DC and federal agencies involved in the cleanup, I was not allowed to discuss any of the information that I learned with my fellow ANC commissioners, other public officials, or members of the public. Even agency representatives were not allowed to share information with their supervisors.

In addition, to concerns about the health and safety of residents in the immediate area, the location of a major DC water reservoir near the area of contamination leads to questions about potential contamination and the possible impact on residents in other areas of the city. In testimony presented on April 12, 2006, to the DC Committee on Public Works and the Environment, Colonel Robert J. Davis, Commander, Baltimore District, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, described why the testing of groundwater, especially for contaminants like perchlorate, is so important.

“As discussed at the Spring Valley RAB meeting last night, our groundwater elevation data does suggest that some limited groundwater is likely seeping into the reservoir at specific locations. However, we expect this volume of groundwater to be minute compared to the Potomac River water entering the reservoir everyday, and we have had no significant detections in the groundwater wells closest to the reservoir.

Our phase-2 investigation later this year and next year will provide much more information as to whether any Spring Valley groundwater contamination detected upgradient of the reservoir could pose a future risk. If the Partnership identifies a significant future risk, we will determine, through consensus, what action should be taken to mitigate that future risk before it becomes a problem.”

Tom Smith and I now have the ability to discuss information with public officials and they can discuss information with others in their agencies, but public access to information remains limited. The DC Department of the Environment is not allowed to know the chemicals that will be brought into DC for use in the destruction of the munitions this summer, nor have they been told specifically the identity of the chemicals in the hazardous waste that will be produced by the destruction.

Our concerns in Spring Valley are not that different from many FUDS communities. Having spent most of my professional life working with scientists and with universities in support of science, I am not here to criticize or complain. It is crucial that all the parties and agencies work together to complete the remediation of this site which my neighbors and I call “home”. We must make certain that the public health and safety are protected and that the data verifying the cleanup is released to the public.

I encourage you to read the Commissioner Smith’s excellent review of the history of the activities. Tom was a resident of the neighborhood at the time of the “rediscovery” of the munitions and other contaminants. Also useful in reviewing the history of the work at Spring Valley is the “Washingtonian” article entitled “Ground Zero” published December 1, 2000.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear and discuss the Spring Valley project with you today.