

The Intelligencer

Opinion

Guest Opinion: EPA playing us for fools

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HORSHAM WATER AND
SEWER AUTHORITY

Thursday marks the third anniversary of when firefighting foam sprang to life in a “special report” on the front page of local papers. The top of page one shouted, “Unclear and uncertain danger,” announcing a water crisis in Bucks and Montgomery counties that continues unabated. The latest headline accuses the EPA of spinning wheels.

In 2015, the Department of the Navy posted a small notice for a public information session set during a workday regarding contamination at the Naval Air Station Joint Reserve Base Willow Grove in Horsham and the Johnsville Naval Air Warfare Center in Warminster. We locals were used to this — we all knew the bases were Superfund sites. And, it’s a 25-minute drive to the Horsham library from Warminster. Less than a week later, my wife nearly died from a thyroid disorder. Last week, she finally finished at Moss Rehabilitation.

It could take her at least a decade to adjust to the traumatic brain injury that occurred from her thyroid. That her father died from a gastric lymphoma while working at Johnsville, continues to freak her out. I’ve got bladder cancer. We’ve got many sick friends and neighbors. As an A-10 Warthog flies and firefighting foam seeps, only 3 miles separate the two bases — both have tested at the highest levels in the nation.

This has long been known and artfully hidden from the public. The earliest concerns date to reports from Dupont in 1954. More than a decade ago, the National Fire Prevention Association’s Committee on firefighting foam stated that consumption of PFOA and PFOS was a death warrant.

Although the EPA lowered its “advisory” limit to 70 parts per trillion, ppt, Harvard University Chan School of Public Health said their research showed that the level should be 1 ppt. Richard Clapp, the leading researcher, spoke at the only

meeting held in Warminster that was sponsored by the township's Environmental Advisory Council. He told us that New Jersey's limit of 14 ppt was closer to what was needed, but is still inadequate.

If we stop being mesmerized by the EPA, Navy and Department of Defense spinning wheels, we'll realize that we're being played for fools. Veterans have taken the brunt. Government strategy has been out of the same playbook that they use for traumatic brain injuries. They used it against Agent Orange claims, PTSD, shell shock and a host of other veteran issues.

But firefighting foam is one of the most difficult chemicals to deal with, and they know it. The reason for stalling is cost. Done correctly, it will cost the Fed trillions of dollars just to help veterans, people, their families and their animals. The longer they wait, the more of us will move away due to aging, many will continue to suffer, some of us will die.

Our answer now lies at the state level. We need to actively support Senate and House bills like Tom Murt's — co-sponsored by Madeleine Dean and others — to set a 5 ppt limit for Pennsylvania. The Delaware Riverkeeper Network, DRN, submitted a similar petition for rulemaking to the Environmental Quality Board, EQB.

Mike Fitzpatrick counseled me when I started working on this. For legislators to act on our behalf we must continue to act. This is our crisis. We determine the outcome. We've done pretty well so far. All our local legislators, Gov. Wolf and Sen. Casey are on our side. We, the people, just need to step it up. It's our water, our health. Over 80,000 local residents and many veterans are depending on what we do. Let's end the spinning wheels.

Warminster resident Larry Menkes is the CEO of Veterans Green Jobs Initiative that finds green jobs for wounded warriors.