



ACQUISITION
AND SUSTAINMENT

THE UNDER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

3010 DEFENSE PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-3010

DEC 28 2018

The Honorable Bernard "Bernie" Sanders
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Sanders:

Thank you for your October 26, 2018, letter to the Secretary of Defense concerning reports that members of the Vermont Army National Guard's Charlie Company, an air ambulance unit currently deployed in support of the Missouri National Guard's 35th Combat Aviation Brigade in "Operation Spartan Shield," may be exposed to hazardous airborne pollution from two active burn pits.

We share your concern for the health and safety of our men and women in uniform potentially exposed to the negative health effects of airborne hazards. As you may already know, the Department developed the Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 4715.19, *Use of Open-Air Burn Pits in Contingency Operations*, and DoDI 4715.22, *Environmental Management Policy for Contingency Locations*, to address the concerns associated with open-air burn pits. Additionally, the U.S. Central Command Headquarters has developed two regulations CCR 200-1, *Protection and Enhancement of Environmental Assets*, and CCR 200-2, *Contingency Environmental Guidance* to provide additional guidance.

Due to the sensitivity of on-going operations, the U.S. Central Command has classified some of the specific contingency location details. However, there are approximately 16 open burn pits in various locations in Syria and Iraq at or near where U.S. forces are deployed. Due to the operational environment and lack of acceptable alternative means of solid waste disposal, U.S. forces are operating burn pits in nine locations. One of these locations is burning medical and hazardous waste, referred to as covered waste. This burn pit was identified to the Armed Services Committees on March 20, 2018 in accordance with DoDI 4715.19. Local contractors are operating six burn pits, however only one is a U.S. contracted operation. U.S. Central Command has requested closure of all contractor or host nation operated burning operations where our servicemembers are located. There is currently no technology or equipment solution that could eliminate all burning operations for every contingency locations.

The DoDI 6055.05, *Occupational and Environmental Health (OEH)*, and DoDI 6490.03, *Deployment Health* require that the Services document OEH hazards. Additionally, DoDI 6055.05 requires personnel exposure data be maintained in the individual's medical record. All medical providers have access to exposures that are documented in the Department of Defense (DoD) Electronic Health Record (EHR) during each member's deployment-related health assessment.

Deployment-Related Health Assessments (DRHA) include the Post-Deployment Health Assessment conducted no later than 30 days after redeployment, and the Post-Deployment

Health Reassessment conducted no later than six months after redeployment. Additionally, the Periodic Health Assessment (PHA) is completed annually for all Service members. These individual health assessments, all of which include a face-to-face encounter with a healthcare provider, also include specific questions on exposure concerns that assist the healthcare provider with evaluations and specialty referrals if indicated. The individual's primary care provider has access to the DHRAs and PHAs through the EHR during medical encounters with Service members.

The healthcare provider may have access to other sources of exposure documentation during DRHAs, such as Periodic Occupational and Environmental Monitoring Summaries (POEMS) completed for deployment locations and other reports provided by supporting public health assets. This will depend on the level of assets available to the locations, medical treatment facility, and medical providers.

Available to healthcare providers beginning in October 2019 will be the new electronic Individual Longitudinal Exposure Record, a joint DoD-VA project to capture a Service member's garrison and deployment exposures during the entire period of service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ellen M. Lord". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Ellen" and last name "Lord" clearly distinguishable.

Ellen M. Lord