Author's response to reviews

Title: Evaluation of mortality among Marines and Navy personnel exposed to contaminated drinking water at USMC Base Camp Lejeune: A retrospective cohort study

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Author's response to reviews: see over
Dear EH staff,

Please consider the manuscript "Evaluation of mortality among marines and navy personnel exposed to contaminated drinking water at U.S. Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune: A retrospective cohort study" for publication in Environmental Health. This manuscript reports the results of a highly visible study, and we feel that it will be of interest to your audience.

The manuscript is an original work, has not been previously published whole or in part, and is not under consideration for publication elsewhere. All authors have read the manuscript, agree the work is ready for submission to a journal, and accept responsibility for the manuscript’s contents. The authors do not have any potential competing interests.

In 1982, the Marine Corps discovered specific volatile organic compounds (VOCs) in the drinking water provided by two of the eight water treatment plants on base. One water system (Tarawa Terrace) was contaminated with perchloroethylene (PCE) from the disposal practices of an off-base dry cleaner. The other water system (Hadnot Point) was contaminated primarily with trichloroethylene (TCE); other contaminants were present as well: PCE, 1,2-dichloroethylene (DCE), vinyl chloride, and benzene. The highly contaminated water supply wells were shut down by mid-February, 1985.

There is strong Congressional, media, and community attention on Camp Lejeune. These stakeholders are eagerly awaiting the results of this study, which is the second in a series of studies that the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) is preparing to publish.

Few studies have examined the association between exposure to specific VOCs and mortality due to cancers and other chronic diseases. This study is unique because we used extensive water modeling to estimate levels of past exposures to specific VOCs.

Our list of possible reviewers includes:

1. Aaron Blair, (retired) Division of Cancer Epidemiology and Genetics, National Cancer Institute, blaira@exchange.nih.gov, 240-276-7120 (phone)
2. Dan Wartenberg, Environmental Epidemiology and Statistics, Environmental and Occupational Health Sciences Institute, Robert Wood Johnson Medical School, Email: dew@eohsi.rutgers.edu, 848-445-0197 (phone)
3. David Kriebel, Work Environment, Lowell Center for Sustainable Production, University of Massachusetts, Lowell. Email: David_Kriebel@uml.edu, 978-934-3270 (phone)

Additionally, this manuscript has been reviewed and approved by senior scientists at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as well as having been peer reviewed by five scientists external to CDC. We look forward to your decision. **We made one change to the manuscript – we have separated figure 1 from the manuscript and put in a separate file as instructed.**

Sincerely,

Frank J. Bove, Sc.D
Senior Epidemiologist
Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry