

**Environmental Restoration Program**  
**at the Spring Valley Formerly Used Defense Site**

**OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION PROGRAM AT THE SPRING  
VALLEY FORMERLY USED DEFENSE SITE**

COMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT REFORM

THE HONORABLE STEPHEN F. LYNCH, CHAIRMAN  
THE HONORABLE JASON CHAFFETZ  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL WORKFORCE, POSTAL SERVICE AND  
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

TESTIMONY OF GEORGE S. HAWKINS, ESQ.

DIRECTOR  
DISTRICT DEPARTMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

WEDNESDAY, JUNE 10, 2009  
RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING  
ROOM 2247

Good afternoon, Chairman Lynch, Congressman Chaffetz, Congresswoman Norton, and members of the Committee. I am George Hawkins, Director of the District Department of the Environment (DDOE). Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony at this Oversight Hearing on the Environmental Restoration Program at the Spring Valley Formerly Used Defense Site. My objectives this afternoon are to describe, from our perspective, the manner in which the District Department of the Environment works in association with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to facilitate the ongoing planning and execution of work activities at Spring Valley. Furthermore, I would like to emphasize some of the recent and ongoing efforts that DDOE has established to foster and encourage communication pathways with District residents.

As you may know, the District of Columbia works to resolve this matter under a 1994 agreement with the Department of Defense. This agreement provides reimbursement to the District for providing technical review and guidance at Installation Restoration projects at both active military facilities and Formerly Used Defense Sites within the District of Columbia. Our goal under this review process is to ensure that restoration work is performed in compliance with District of Columbia environmental laws and regulations, and that the work is protective of the environment, and human health.

Currently our attention is mainly focused on three sites: the Washington Navy Yard, which is the only Superfund site in the District, Bolling Air Force Base, and of course, Spring Valley. The District's environmental program has been involved with the Spring Valley project since June 1995, when two Environmental Specialists were hired soon after a Record of Decision was issued stating that "no further action" was needed at the Site. It was the work of these two District staff members that ultimately resulted in the Corps of Engineers returning to Spring Valley, and brought us to where we are today.

Since the Corps returned, we have been involved in a partnering process with them and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to ensure the highest quality of work is done to investigate and remediate the contaminants left behind by the Army after World War I in Spring Valley. The partners meet on a monthly basis, and no work is initiated unless, or until all three partners agree on how to proceed. If either the District or EPA, or both, disagrees with a proposed plan or procedure, the action will not occur.

Currently there are two major issues upon which our attention is focused: the ongoing groundwater study, and the planned on-site destruction of chemical weapons. We have been in discussions for some time concerning plans for the next phase of the groundwater investigation, and have recently come to an agreement on how this work will be accomplished. We expect that a new round of groundwater sampling will occur later this summer or in early fall.

The District is interested in the groundwater results for two reasons. The first is the obvious need to determine if contamination, particularly perchlorates, is potentially affecting the Dalecarlia reservoir, which supplies the drinking water to the entire District of Columbia. Even though sampling so far has indicated that the reservoir has not been affected, we have been concerned that perchlorate contamination may reach the deeper aquifer. For that reason, we have insisted that the Corps conduct deep well sampling. The second reason to continue groundwater sampling is to hopefully assist in locating the source of the perchlorates that have been detected in the groundwater at high levels near the American University campus. Locating the source of perchlorates might help in locating a yet-to-be discovered burial pit that has been mentioned in some of the historical archives.

In response to the proposed on-site destruction of chemical weapons, DDOE has been briefed on the Corps of Engineers' conceptual plan for this activity. Based on the information that we have received to date, we believe that the Corps' proposal poses the least possible threat compared to the alternatives, and that it can be done in a manner that protects human safety and the environment. Clearly, the use of explosives for the on-site destruction of munitions requires the cooperation of several District agencies besides the Department of the Environment. The District's Homeland Security and Emergency Management Agency (HSEMA), Metropolitan Police Department, Fire Department and Health Department have all been briefed by the Corps of Engineers, and all agencies are currently reviewing the plans for this event. District Government sign-off on this plan will occur after reviews have been completed by all agencies. If any agency has concerns with the plan, then approval will not occur until all uncertainties have been satisfactorily addressed.

While these are the two major issues right now, there are several other efforts at Spring Valley which appear to be nearing completion. As the Corps comes close to completing the currently planned field work by the end of 2010, all of the partners are involved in deciding the criteria for determining when the site can be closed out. The issue of closure criteria was asked once before in 1995, and it was the District of Columbia's environmental program that determined that additional work was necessary, and the Corp returned to Spring Valley. Since then, burial pits and chemical weapons have been found, tens of thousands of samples have been analyzed, scores of properties have been remediated, and additional scores of properties have been geophysically surveyed. Many of these properties have been dug up in the hopes of finding burial pits or single pieces of munitions.

Still more work remains to be done. The Spring Valley project is unique, it is complicated, and it is challenging. The Corps must continue to follow the protocols and procedures established in the National Contingency Plan, and we must use our best professional judgment every day, calling in other experts and specialists whenever necessary. Most importantly, we must ask the right questions and the tough questions. The District Department of the Environment asked the right and tough questions in 1995, and we continue to ask them today. We insist that the work will be performed completely, properly, and safely.

The Department of the Environment has pledged to continue to act as an aggressive environmental advocate for the citizens of Spring Valley. We have devoted many resources to the clean up of Spring Valley over the years. Currently we have a manager designated as DDOE's primary representative, as well as several staff who assist in reviewing planned activities, bringing specialized groundwater and hazardous waste experience to bear. We will also have a toxicologist on board in the next month who will bring additional, specialized expertise to our team.

Finally, I would like to address the issue of transparency and accountability. While we believe we have done an excellent job to ensure that the Corps' work at Spring Valley is conducted in the most protective manner, we have been approached by members of the community who seek improved communications by all parties. Restoration Advisory Board meetings are open to the public and this has been the policy

since 2001. DDOE representatives have participated in each of these monthly meetings ever since the RAB's inception. In addition, we have attended every community meeting hosted by the Corps and have made ourselves available to respond to community questions and concerns.

Still, we agree that we can and should continue to raise the bar and be more proactive in our relations with the community. To that purpose, we have committed ourselves to hosting recurring meetings with the two Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners who represent Spring Valley, Nan Wells and Tom Smith. We have had two meetings so far, and while we limited the first meeting to those two individuals in order to focus on their specific questions about DDOE's role in Spring Valley, we have agreed to include others in subsequent meetings as special circumstances or concerns arise. Upon invitation by ANC Smith, DDOE recently participated in a successful Ward 3 Democratic Committee panel discussion on Spring Valley that was held on Earth Day, and are also in the process of adding information on Spring Valley to our DDOE Web Site to keep citizens better informed.

Chairman Lynch and members of the Committee, I wish to thank you once again for the opportunity to testify, and we look forward to answering any questions the Committee may have.