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Chemical burial confirmed in Camp Carroll

By Lee Tae-hoon

Results of two previous pollution investigations released Thursday confirmed allegations that toxic chemicals, including dioxins, were dumped in a U.S. base in Korea in the late 1970s.

The revelation came from the U.S. Forces in Korea (USFK) making public the outcomes of land surveys that were conducted in 1992 and 2004 on Camp Carroll, a U.S. logistics base in Chilgok, North Gyeongsang Province.

The USFK had been under pressure to disclose their findings following a barrage of media reports that U.S. soldiers buried hundred barrels of Agent Orange there in 1978.

Agent Orange, a toxic defoliant widely used during the Vietnam War, was sprayed around the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in Korea in the late 1960s to remove vegetation on the border.

Dioxins are highly toxic compounds created as Agent Orange decomposes. They are notorious for causing serious health problems, including mental illness, cancer and fetal deformities to those who are exposed to them.

A 2004 report by Samsung shows that traces of harmful chemicals, including dioxins, were found inside the U.S. camp.

It claimed that soil samples obtained from the base contained concentrations of numerous contaminants including pesticides and dioxins.

"Hazardous materials and waste, including solvents, petroleum oils and lubricants, pesticides, herbicides and other industrial chemicals have been used and stored onsite for over 40 years," it stated.

It also noted that a large portion of the chemicals and surrounding soil were excavated between 1982 and 1983 and placed into 55-gallon drums.

"The fate of the excavated drums is unknown," it added, noting that residual amounts of contaminated material may have remained despite the removal.

The report estimated that it would cost \$93.8 million for the removal of all the contaminated soil from Camp Carroll.

The Historical Land Use and Background Survey, prepared in 1992 by Woodward-Clyde Consultants in California, also confirmed the burial of toxic chemicals in Camp Carroll.

"Many potential sources of soil and groundwater contamination still exist at the base and the presence of contaminated groundwater has been documented," the report said.

"From 1979 to 1980, approximately 6,100 cubic feet (40 to 60 tons) of soil were reportedly excavated from this area and disposed offsite," the document said.

It also acknowledged an unconfirmed report that Agent Orange was stored there during the Vietnam War, but later moved offsite.

The USFK, however, downplayed the issue, arguing that the chemicals listed in the two documents do not include Agent Orange and contamination in the U.S. base was below the level considered hazardous to public health.

"The bottom line up front is that the chemicals listed in the two documents do not include Agent Orange," Col. Joseph Birchmeier, a USFK engineer, told the press. "Trace amounts of dioxins, below health concern levels,

were found in some samples from Area 41 and Area D.”

He claimed that no reports or documents confirmed allegations that Agent Orange was stored in Camp Carroll.

Birchmeier said the presence of these compounds does not conclusively indicate the presence of Agent Orange as dioxins may come from various sources.

“Exhaust from gas and diesel engines and emissions from forest fires, municipal solid waste and industrial incinerators may also produce dioxins,” he said.

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