



# ROSEMERE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

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Feb 23, 2009

Dan Opalski, Director  
Office of Environmental Cleanup  
USEPA Region X  
1200 Sixth Avenue  
Seattle, WA 98101

Sent Via Fax: 206-553-1809

Re: Camp Bonneville Petition for Preliminary Assessment, submitted Feb. 3, 2009

Dear Mr. Opalski,

As a member of both Rosemere Neighborhood Association and Columbia Riverkeeper (two volunteer-based environmental organizations that filed the noted petition to place Camp Bonneville on the National Priorities List), I am compelled to write to you personally in hope that you will consider additional concerns we share about this site. Camp Bonneville is the first “dirty transfer” of its kind in the US, where munitions are involved in a cleanup for property with intended re-use as a public park. Given these extraordinary circumstances, the precedent setting actions at Camp Bonneville will certainly impact how similar military surplus properties around the country will be mitigated in the future.

It is our understanding that EPA will soon meet with Washington State Department of Ecology staff to discuss the petition and to obtain information about the status of the cleanup program currently underway at the site. Ecology staff have already stated publicly that they do not believe the petition will score sufficiently to merit any further involvement by EPA. Ecology perceives the upcoming meeting with EPA as a mere formality that will subsequently catalyze the denial of the petition, and Ecology opines that the Superfund program is functionally obsolete and impotent due to a lack of funding. These developments make it appear that Ecology does not take EPA’s petition process or authority on cleanup matters seriously. Ecology’s views are ironic in light of the fact that Governor Gregoire is considering the liquidation of the state Model Toxic Control Account due to drastic budgetary shortfalls. Without MTCA funding, the state’s continued role in cleanup actions would be seriously undermined.

Ecology dismisses the public concerns raised by the petitioners by declaring that it “has a pretty good handle on the munitions side of things,” and Ecology believes it can compel both the Army and the cleanup contractor to higher levels of performance on 14 new Areas of Concern. This kind of posturing does not take into account that Ecology has not successfully compelled the Army to alter its present course of action, which is simply to limit exposure, liability, involvement, and any increases in post-dirty transfer funding. The history of inadequate assessment of the site is proof of Ecology’s perceived lack of enforcement authority on this project.

The petitioners fully understand that, under current policy, a site will only be placed on the National Priorities List with concurrence by the State of Washington. Furthermore, the petitioners are aware that it is unlikely Ecology will concur with the listing of Camp Bonneville, nor will Ecology willingly collaborate with EPA to overcome the obstacles to adequate cleanup as outlined in the petition. The Department of Defense has denied a recent request to re-establish the Camp Bonneville Restoration Advisory Board, and it has blocked EPA’s

efforts to complete cleanup guidelines specific to military sites with munitions. It is unfortunate for the residents of Clark County to find themselves subject to what could be described as a dysfunctional political stalemate without recourse. We would become the fateful owners of a legacy fraught with poor decisions. The petition was sought as a means to overcome this unwarranted burden.

The dynamics at Camp Bonneville have, in effect, allowed contractors to enter into the scene with the intention to spend federal dollars without accountability or proper oversight, to demand additional cleanup dollars without tapping into cost overrun insurance, to attempt reductions in cleanup standards, and to argue that their “hands are tied” if their demands are not met. Accountability is further clouded by potential loopholes in contracts that allow this behavior to persist and provide a means for the main parties to indemnify each other. Without corrective action, the public will inevitably suffer from soaring costs, a defunct cleanup plan and the continued threat to public and environmental health and safety. This is truly a grim outlook.

The contractor is again demanding the cessation of water quality monitoring, claiming that the groundwater has been stabilized -- this is justified with assertions that continued monitoring is unnecessary and too expensive. It is difficult to understand how a seasoned water purveyor (former chairman of the Los Angeles MetroWater District, one of the largest districts in the country), who was lauded for his deep-rooted environmental ethics, can allege that the water is safe at Camp Bonneville when current data shows increases in groundwater contaminants at certain stations and an absence of adequate hydrogeologic monitoring to ensure containment. All this at a time when the on-site water supply cannot be tapped for human consumption. The problems at this site were a primary focus for pursuing and achieving Sole Source Aquifer designation for the Troutdale Aquifer System in Clark County. Camp Bonneville is squarely located in the designated protection area of our vulnerable Sole Source Aquifer, where 99.4% of the residents in the area depend entirely upon groundwater for their potable water supply.

Years ago, EPA spoke up and said the dirty transfer was a bad idea. The petitioners sincerely agree. And yet here we are in the middle of a quagmire that has worsened with soured relations and threats of litigation. It would be difficult to fully describe the level of frustration felt by many, including EPA staff, who have born witness to the Camp Bonneville story -- this frustration is the driver of this letter.

The petitioners respectfully request EPA to take bold new steps to enact policy that will institute inter-agency collaboration where it is desperately needed. New policy of this kind can remove impediments to performance of cleanup standards, can help ensure accountability for public expenditures (especially during the present national financial crisis), and will allow EPA to embrace the full extent of agency authority to execute higher levels of environmental protection for dangerous military sites. The petitioners firmly believe that EPA is the right agency to change the course at Camp Bonneville for the benefit of all. We ask for the EPA to ensure the contamination from Camp Bonneville does not migrate offsite into sensitive wetlands, waterways, wells and surrounding residential areas, and for EPA to prevent release of this property for redevelopment until it is wholly fit to do so without encroaching upon the welfare of the public and our natural resources. We do not believe these needed objectives are currently being met or that the state can adequately defend the public’s need with respect to this project. We firmly believe that without EPA’s assistance, the “business as usual approach” used by Clark County, the contractors, Ecology and the Army will only exacerbate negative consequences.

We urge you to take whatever steps are necessary to put an end to the debacle at Camp Bonneville, whether it is achieved with state concurrence or through other means. Our heartfelt hopes are with you.

Sincerely,

Dvija Michael Bertish