

Oral Testimony

**Colonel Charles J. Fiala, Jr.
Commander
Baltimore District
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

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Good morning. I am Colonel Chuck Fiala, commander of the Baltimore District, Army Corps of Engineers. Thank you for inviting me to testify.

Since February 1993, the Baltimore District has been the lead Army agency responsible for site operations in the environmental clean up at the Spring Valley Formerly Used Defense Site in Washington, D.C.

I want to start out by letting you know we share the concerns of the community. I have a large team of dedicated specialists working on this project, headed by my site operations officer, Major Mike Peloquin. And while the members of his team may not live in Spring Valley, they view themselves as members of the community, and they take their work very seriously.

To illustrate this point, I'd like to share with you some comments made by one Spring Valley's residents when Mike's predecessor, Major Brian Plaisted, was preparing to retire a few months ago. This resident said Brian has:

"...earned the respect of the members of the Spring Valley-Wesley Heights Citizens Association. He has pursued a very difficult mission with care and good judgement, always with an eye to the interests of residents of this area. We thank him for his concern for the well-being of people living near the chemical warfare operations site, and for his untiring efforts to keep residents informed."

This is a complex problem. There are no easy solutions. We have a large site, over 660 acres, with what now appears to be isolated areas of contamination. Trying to find this contamination is a little like trying to find the proverbial needle in a haystack—difficult, but not impossible. The contamination resulted from activities that took place over 80 years ago, when today's strict environmental laws and regulations did not exist. Many of the activities and disposal practices were undocumented. And to complicate the problem further, what was once a largely rural area has been extensively developed, so that the topography of today is nothing like it was 80 years ago.

A detailed chronology of our involvement is provided in my written testimony. Right now, I would like to emphasize that from the beginning of our involvement in Spring Valley, we have worked hard to make our investigation totally open and include the community in the process. We are continually looking for better ways to do this. Our latest effort in this regard was the establishment of a Restoration Advisory Board made up of residents, business interests, and the involved government agencies.

We've coordinated our actions with EPA, the D.C. government, other Defense agencies and the community. We have conducted the sampling, laboratory analysis, and risk assessments using the latest sampling techniques and testing protocols. A top priority of the Army has been, and continues to be, the health and safety of the community and the workers.

Past decisions can always be criticized in hindsight, but I believe that they were made in good faith with the best information available at the time. We will continue to coordinate our work at Spring Valley openly and in full consultation with the community, D.C government, and the EPA. The Army Corps of Engineers is committed to aggressively identifying and removing all hazards associated with past Defense actions in the Spring Valley neighborhood. This commitment is supported by resources from numerous Army agencies, including personal involvement at the Secretariat level, and by on-site support from the world's foremost experts on ordnance, chemical warfare material, and aerial photo interpretation.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. This concludes my remarks, and I will be happy to take your questions.