

Advocates Warn Navy Site Cleanup Data Doubts Could Affect More States

Environmental justice advocates are warning that doubts over the accuracy of a federal contractor's data for a Navy site cleanup in California -- which prompted EPA and the state to suspend cleanup at the site -- could raise questions over cleanups in a host of other states where the company is in charge of remediation efforts.

An advocacy source says that the EPA actions in California should be a wake-up call to regulators and communities in other states that are dealing with major site cleanups involving the company Tetra Tech, Inc. The Navy site issue “absolutely has relevance nationally as Tetra Tech is one of the main government contractors at cleanup sites coast to coast . . . and is a major player in site remediation nationally and beyond,” the source says.

The source points in part to an Aug. 1 press release from the company announcing that Tetra Tech was just awarded \$200 million under a Navy “CLEAN Contract” to provide environmental engineering support services to installations in the northeastern and southeastern United States, as an example of the company's breadth.

Tetra Tech describes itself in part as a “leading provider of consulting and engineering services,” supporting “commercial and government clients focused on water, environment, infrastructure, resource management, energy, and international development,” with 16,000 staff worldwide, according to the release. A spokesman for the company did not respond to a request by press time on the concerns over the Navy site data.

The company is the lead contractor on cleanup of the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard Superfund Site in Bayview Hunters Point, San Francisco, and adjacent areas. EPA Region 9, which includes California, recently sent a letter to the Navy noting that there are investigations into the veracity of Tetra Tech's data on the cleanup.

Angeles Herrera, assistant director of EPA Region 9's Superfund division, and Janet Naito, cleanup program branch chief of California's Department of Toxic Substances Control, noted the investigations in a Sept. 13 letter to Lawrence Lansdale, environmental director of the Navy's western base realignment and closure program.

The environmental agencies confirm an agreement reached in July that the Navy “will not propose any further transfers of Navy property at [Hunters Point] without results of these investigations and/or any other Navy action necessary to clarify the actual potential public exposure to radioactive material at and near the” site.

The regulators say they “understand that several agencies are currently engaged in ongoing investigations regarding the nature and extent of Tetra Tech's misrepresentation of data delivered to the Navy,” and that “integrity of the data from the Navy's contractor Tetra Tech ECI, Incorporated . . . is of the utmost importance in ensuring the cleanup decisions are made in a manner that protects public health and the environment and complies with requirements of the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation, and Liability Act (CERCLA).”

In a Sept. 16 press release, Marie Harrison of Greenaction for Health & Environmental Justice said, “We demand that Tetra Tech be fired and that they pay for a trustworthy and independent entity to conduct comprehensive retesting” of the site. “We demand a full and proper cleanup of radioactive and toxic waste at

the shipyard site. . . . With climate change causing the sea levels to rise, leaving so much radioactive and toxic waste along the waterfront is a disaster ready to happen.”

Data Concerns

Equity advocates say the “scandal” first arose several years ago when whistleblowers alleged that from 2008 to 2012 the company falsified radioactive soil samples from the shipyard. After the Navy investigated the complaints, they identified 386 soil samples as “anomalous,” the advocates say in the press release.

They also cite a Nuclear Regulatory Commission letter to Tetra Tech EC, Inc. on Feb. 11, 2016, that charged in part that in 2011 and 2012, “when tasked with obtaining soil samples to ascertain the amount of residual radioactivity in specific locations within Parcel C, Tetra Tech employees instead obtained soil samples from other areas that were suspected to be less contaminated.” The company employees “then represented (on related chain-of-custody records) that the samples had been obtained from the specified locations. As a result, it could have appeared that residual radioactivity within the specified locations in Parcel C was lower than it actually was.”

While residents and community and environmental justice organizations “applaud the government agencies’ new action to put a hold on new transfers of Shipyard land from the Navy, they are furious that the Navy and government regulatory agencies have allowed Tetra Tech to continue working at the site,” the press release adds.

“It’s about time our government agencies started protecting the residents instead of protecting a giant corporation that apparently falsified soil samples, putting the health of thousands of people and our environment at risk,” said Bradley Angel, executive director of Greenaction for Health and Environmental Justice.

The advocates are calling for more sanctions from the environmental agencies. “The stopping the transferring property from the Navy to the city is a good first step,” said Ray Tompkins of the Clean Air Health Alliance, in the release. “A cease-and-desist order of all work at the Hunters Point Naval Shipyard should be executed immediately. . . . We demand a proper investigation by federal and state agencies with independent universities and meaningful citizen participation for locating and cleaning up the illegally dumped radioactive soil at and near the Shipyard site, with testing including both surface scanning and core sampling.” -- Curt Barry (cbarry@iwpnews.com)