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Camp Lejeune Water Study continuing

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The U.S. Department of the Navy is looking for Marines or other individuals who may have been exposed to contaminated drinking water while working on Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune, N.C., from 1957 to 1987.

Nelson Law, a retired Marine living in Gassville, said he first learned about the contamination Sept. 2 while visiting relatives in Illinois. A Carterville, Ill., television station filed a report on the contamination and related survey and the potential that some Marines may have fallen through cracks in the U.S. Department of Defense's yearlong efforts to identify an estimated 75,000 military personnel who lived on the base during the 30-year study period.

Law, 66, was a motor mechanic for the Marines at Camp Lejeune from 1961-64.

"I don't want to scare anyone, but this is good general information that others may be interested in," said Law.

A Web site hosted by the U.S. Marine Corps is dedicated exclusively to the Camp Lejeune Water Study at <https://clnr.hqi.usmc.mil/clsurvey/index.html>. Marines who were stationed at Camp Lejeune during the study years are asked to register at that Web site or call the Marines toll-free at (877) 261-9782.

The contaminated water came from wells at three locations on the base that supplied water to treatment plants on base. The wells were shut down in 1984. Contractors for the Environmental Protection Agency first found tetrachloroethylene, dichloroethylene and benzene in drinking water in 1980, according to the Marine Web site. The chemicals are solvents used in an array of applications from dry cleaning to pesticides.

The tetrachloroethylene contamination was attributed to the waste disposal practices of a dry-cleaning service off base. Sources of other chemicals were traced to various underground storage facilities, according to the Web site.

Concentrations were measured in micrograms per liter ranging from 20 to 90. The EPA did not have regulatory standards in place for the chemicals at the relatively small levels at the time of discovery, according to the USMC.

The recurring presence of the chemicals led laboratory scientists to test the raw water supply from the wells that fed water treatment plants. Those tests found most wells on the base to be contaminated with the chemicals.

The EPA sent the information to the federal Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry in 1997.

Registry investigators have since screened some 12,598 former residents of Camp Lejeune and concluded that drinking water contaminated with the chemicals may be associated with elevated risk of decreased average birth weight, childhood cancers and birth defects. The investigation is ongoing.

Today, the EPA can act against water sources containing levels of tetrachloroethylene, dichloroethylene and benzene at 5 micrograms per liter or greater, according to Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

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