



March 15, 2019

The Honorable Dr. Mark T. Esper  
Secretary of the Army  
101 Army Pentagon, Washington D.C.  
20310-0101

Dear Secretary Esper:

The Congress and advocates for U.S. military personnel such as ROA have been receiving troubling reports of toxic exposure in post-9/11 war zones, including Iraq and Afghanistan. This exposure harms the health and morale of troops, and undermines public confidence in the military's leadership. As FY 2018 closed, ROA and the Enlisted Association of the National Guard of the United States issued a joint letter on September 4, 2018, urging the Office of Management and Budget to allocate unobligated end-of-year funds to jumpstart the fielding of waste management incinerators to DoD for base camps, to provide combatant commands with the tools necessary to manage the tons of waste generated by our forces abroad and to end open air burn pits. No action was taken by the administration or the Congress.

Reports from reliable sources indicate open pit burning continues in conflict zones, mystifying considering there is ample evidence linking open burn pits to debilitating and deadly diseases and illnesses. The military services continue to plan for the organization and equipping of expeditionary base camps but apparently provide no funding for waste management equipment such as expeditionary incinerators, which commanders can use to eliminate waste in an environmentally responsible way to reduce toxic exposure to military personnel, contractors, and host nation civilians around U.S. expeditionary base camps.

It was reported in September 2018 that the relatively modest sum of \$18,000,000 is enough to jumpstart the acquisition of waste management incinerators with the eventual goal of equipping all combatant commands to eliminate the toxic threat posed by burn pits. The office of the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction filed a final report on February 10, 2015 (SIGAR 15-33-AL), entitled, "Final Assessment: What We Have Learned From Our Inspections of Incinerators and Use of Burn Pits in Afghanistan." The introductory letter emphasizes a glaring shortfall in adequate prevention that still exists: *"This report highlights the ways in which incinerator operations in Afghanistan were not conducted in a manner that resulted in the most efficient use of U.S. taxpayer funds . . . . Given the fact that DoD has been aware for many years of the significant health risks associated with open-air burn pits, it is indefensible that U.S. military personnel, who are already at risk of serious injury and death when fighting the enemy, were put at further risk from potentially harmful emissions from the use of open-air burn pits."*

The challenges cited in the SIGAR report have not been addressed by those who have the requisite authority and responsibility. A December 2017 Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Environment, Safety and Occupational Health report, "Implementing Waste Dispos-

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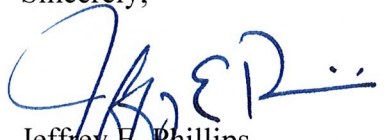
al Alternatives in Overseas Contingency Operations,” compiles efforts aimed at further *study* of the problem. What we need, sir, is *action*: specifically, the use of solutions that already exist. Incinerators have proven effective in the field; reports indicate that the Army alone needs at least 250. Incinerators eliminate the bulk of toxic waste and address the immediate problem. Advanced “waste-to-energy” technologies are too immature and pursuit of this technology delays the mandated use of incinerators available now. The U.S. Army Soldier Systems Center, PM Force Sustainment Systems, has evaluated and validated the Expeditionary Solid Waste Disposal System (ESWDS) but no funding has been provided. The result is that by default open burn pits remain as options for commanders.

ROA urges the Army and the combatant commanders it supports, and other senior leaders responsible for the environmental quality experienced by their troops to employ viable solutions to reduce open burn-pit toxic exposure. Failure to do so should be a factor in evaluating fitness for promotion and command.

As we engage the Congress and the administration, Our immediate goal is to help the U.S. military do the right thing by securing this initial investment to jumpstart the acquisition of necessary equipment. In FY 2019, we urge the Army to reprogram \$18M for initial fielding, \$54M to equip the base camps in Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Africa and \$150M-plus in funding necessary to eliminate open-pit burning in overseas contingency operations just as it has been outlawed in the U.S. since the 1970s.

Mr. Secretary, we are creating another Agent Orange fiasco; delays must end and action must begin. We trust that our message will resonate with American military leaders, who take pride in the care of their troops.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey E. Phillips  
Maj. Gen., U.S. Army (Ret.)  
Executive Director

Mr. Secretary,  
Thank you for your  
service and your  
impressive leadership  
on Aug.!