

Congressman Rothman Gets Federal Government to Re-Open Investigation into Health of Vieques Residents

(Washington, DC) — Today, Congressman Steve Rothman (D — NJ), as a member of the U.S. House Science and Technology Committee, successfully pressed the head of the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) to re-examine the agency's inadequate health assessments for the inhabitants of the island of Vieques, Puerto Rico.

"I am pleased that Dr. Frumkin from ATSDR is willing to re-open his agency's Vieques health studies. I find it unacceptable that the residents of Vieques have not been given a fair assessment of the health risks associated with years of U.S. Navy activity on their island," said Rothman. "It is obvious that ATSDR's studies declaring no negative impact are highly controversial and have been refuted by a number of independent studies, as well as anecdotal evidence."

For more than 60 years, until May 2003, the U.S. Navy practiced bombing runs on the island of Vieques with live ordinance, depleted uranium and napalm. However, the island of nearly 10,000 United States citizens, was left with a toxic legacy and a health crisis that has been well documented by several independent studies and reports.

ATSDR, an agency within the Center for Disease Control is an investigative body tasked with determining links between a community's environment and public health problems. The ATSDR conducted four "public health assessments" in Vieques between 2001 and 2003 and concluded, in essence, that despite an increased rate of cancer among residents, and the exposure of the people of Vieques to a myriad of toxics and chemicals released during military training practices and bombings, there are no harmful health effects to the people of Vieques.

The ATSDR's public health assessments in Vieques have been widely criticized by members of the academic and scientific communities as being too small in scope, relying on poor methodology and arriving at faulty conclusions.

"Dr. Frumkin's open assessment today, that a full review of ATSDR's previous findings is in order, is a long delayed, but welcome acknowledgment of the highly conflicting scientific evidence and the need for a new and more reliable study," said Rothman.

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