

Army Corps Seeks To Reassure Camp Hero Residents, But They And Town Officials Are Not Convinced



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By [Michael Wright](#)

East Hampton Town officials and some Montauk residents remained skeptical after assurances last week from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that decades of contamination at the former Camp Hero military base in Montauk do not pose a continuing health threat.

Engineers from the Army Corps recently completed the testing phase of a three-year, \$4 million study of the 754-acre former U.S. Army and Air Force base. They say they have determined that there is no evidence of "actionable" contamination in the soil or groundwater, despite having identified 47 areas of concern where spills were recorded or potential contaminants were stored and used over the 40-odd years the site was a military base.

"Since we don't have any actionable risk at the site, we are not recommending any further action at any of the sites at Camp Hero," said Greg Goepfert, the New York project manager for the Army Corps, at a review of the federal study in the Montauk Library on Thursday, October 24.

In his presentation to several dozen residents, Mr. Goepfert said that engineers had taken some 1,300 soil and water samples at the base, focusing on those areas where contamination was known or believed to have been likely. None of the samples showed traces of contamination sufficient to warrant remediation, and the vast majority showed no signs of contamination at all, he said.

One location still has heightened traces of diesel fuel, where a spill was discovered in 1993, traced to a large storage tank near a former generator building. Mr. Goepfert said that spill was addressed by New York State at the time, which removed nearly 5,000 tons of contaminated soil. Remaining traces of the spill are gradually dissipating through natural processes, he said, and do not pose a health risk.

Residents of the small residential neighborhood on the former base's western end expressed lingering concerns about that and other spill incidents they'd been told of, and incidences of health concerns from their community.

Resident Charles Engstrom said that he'd been told that there was a 10,000-gallon spill of fuel from a tank on the property that flowed over the ground all the way to Oyster Pond.

He said that rates of cancer in the small community have been high — 20 percent of the 27 families there having had cases of cancer, he said.

"I draw my water from 188 feet, adjacent to the camp, I'm wondering, did any of your testing go down 135 feet?" asked Ed Johann, a resident of the area. "I know you said there wasn't any leaching, but did you do any testing? It's 50 years."

Mr. Geopfert said that the groundwater beneath Camp Hero is what is known as "perched," because it is contained relatively near the surface by a layer of clay, so that any contamination from a spill at the base would not have reached deep groundwater.

But after the meeting Town Natural Resources Director Kim Shaw and Chief Environmental Analyst Brian Frank both said they were skeptical of that assessment and think the Army Corps should test the groundwater stores below the layer of clay. "Clay is not uniform," Mr. Frank said. "There are ways to get through it here and there."

Ms. Shaw said she was bothered by the Army Corps qualifying its study as focusing only on chemicals that would have been related to the military installations — and therefore the responsibility of the federal government to clean up.

Town Councilwoman Sylvia Overby echoed the staffers' concerns, saying that the acknowledgment that there is some contamination on the site is bothersome, and she thinks the Army Corps should do additional testing to be certain that there are not lingering concerns.

The Army Corps is accepting public comments on the study until November 15 and will then consider whether further study is warranted, Mr. Goepfert said.

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