

New Study Links Cancers to Camp Lejeune Water Contamination

Authors called the study 'one of the largest cancer incidence cohort studies in the United States'

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A study published in January found an increased risk for cancers among troops and civilian contractors stationed at Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune in North Carolina. The risk was 20 percent higher for them than personnel based at Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton in California.

The study, titled Evaluation of Cancer Incidence Among Marines and Navy Personnel and Civilian Workers Exposed to Contaminated Drinking Water at USMC Base Camp Lejeune: A Cohort Study, reviewed the impact of polluted water exposure and the occurrence of cancers among military personnel and civilian workers. Researchers wanted to investigate whether exposure to contaminated water at Camp Lejeune from 1975 to 1985 increased the risk of cancer among the base's civilian work force and troops.

“This is one of the largest studies of this type conducted in the United States,” according to the Centers for Disease Control, “having used cancer registry data from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Pacific Islands, the Department of Defense and the Department of VA.”

The report compared cancer rates among troops and civilian workers at Camp Lejeune and Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s. The study analyzed 154,821 Camp Lejeune and 163,484 Camp Pendleton personnel. Before 1986, Camp Pendleton's drinking water “was not known to be contaminated,” which provided a control group for the Camp Lejeune study.

According to the report, researchers compared cancer-related mortality rates of troops and civilian workers at Camp Lejeune from 1975 to 1985 and Camp Pendleton from 1973 to

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1985. Compared to other locations, both groups had “elevated risks of mortality” from kidney, rectum, lung, prostate, leukemias and multiple myeloma.

For the study, researchers did not analyze families who lived on the bases. The study acknowledged that many families who resided in base housing and used contaminated water “may have had exposure durations that were longer” than most troops stationed on the base due to training outside of the base and deployments.

“The results of this study are relevant to all individuals exposed to the contaminated drinking water at Camp Lejeune and add to the literature on the health effects of these contaminants,” according to the study. “It is hoped that this study encourages future research on the health effects of drinking water exposure to these chemicals.”

As of VFW magazine’s press deadline, the study had not been peer reviewed.

This article is featured in the 2024 June/July issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiwa](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.