

## Barrasso Speech on TCE Contamination in Cheyenne

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**December 11, 2008**

Mr. BARRASSO. Madam President, I stand here today holding a 500-page report, a report that was sent to my office yesterday by the Army Corps of Engineers. I will not read the whole report, I am happy to say, but I want to call attention to the Senate and to the country, as well as to the people of Wyoming, what is contained within this report.

This report, at a cost of who knows how many taxpayer dollars, says something I have known and the people of Wyoming have known to be true. It says the Army Corps of Engineers is responsible for the contamination of the water wells of the city of Cheyenne. Now, let me clarify. The report does not actually say the words "we are responsible." Washington could never admit its faults so directly. No. Instead, the report states that other potential sources of contamination, other potential sources of this trichloroethylene--the contaminant, the chemical that is in our city's wells--it says that other potential sources "may be limited." I guess that is Washington's way of saying: It was us.

The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality and the city of Cheyenne found evidence of trichloroethylene in the water supply in 1998--10 years ago. The culprit is a dormant Cold War-era nuclear missile area. It is a missile site and has been there for a long time. The Army Corps of Engineers admits that over 1,800 gallons of this contaminant, TCE, was dumped at the Atlas 4 nuclear missile site each year--each year--of the operation of the missile site, beginning in the mid-1960s.

Well, the discharge of TCE the Army Corps admits to is a mere 1 mile--1 mile--from the water wells of the city of Cheyenne. The Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality has claimed there is one giant plume of TCE emanating from the former nuclear missile site, working its way into and then contaminating the city's water wells. The missile site is currently being cleaned up under the Superfund laws by the Army Corps of Engineers. Unfortunately, the Army Corps only admits culpability for TCE contamination directly emanating from the nuclear missile site. They allege that there is actually a gap between the plume they admit to at the nuclear missile site and the one around the city's water wells--1 mile apart.

Now, you might think it odd that the Department of Defense, given the volume of this chemical that has been dumped year after year in rural Wyoming, would not admit that it was the responsible party for contaminating the city's wells. That would just make sense. They would say: Yes, we dumped it here. It is right here, a mile away in the wells. It is our fault. No. It would just make sense to us that they would admit it. But, in fact, the Army Corps over the last few years has looked to blame almost anyone else, has looked to blame others than to say they are responsible for contaminating the city's wells. Well, such claims have included that there might have been a train derailment and the train might have been carrying TCE into the area. They said it might have been from a nearby oil rig, it might have been from a local shooting range. The Army Corps said: Anybody but us.

I became involved in this issue after I felt the city of Cheyenne and the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality were being ignored by Washington. As ranking member of the Superfund and Environmental Health Subcommittee, I pushed for testing of the ground in that 1-mile area between the nuclear missile site and the water wells of the city of Cheyenne. The Army Corps finally agreed to do the testing and said it would also look into the historical use of this chemical in the Cheyenne area to make sure there was not another responsible party for the contamination.

The final results--all 500 pages--were finally released this week. To no one's surprise who lives in Wyoming, to no one's surprise who is familiar with this issue, to no one's surprise but the Army Corps of Engineers, the contaminating chemical, TCE, was found in the ground between the nuclear missile site and the city's water wells, right where we said it would be. The report also revealed they found no other public records of TCE use in the Cheyenne area for any other reason. It just makes sense to us, and the cause is clear. Given these findings, it is time for the Army Corps to provide the funding the city needs to manage and to complete the current cleanup efforts.

Now, let me be clear. The city of Cheyenne's water is safe. Untold thousands of taxpayer dollars have gone to keep TCE out of the water supply. The city of Cheyenne and the State of Wyoming have implemented the effective procedures to protect the folks in Cheyenne. Those efforts have been completely successful. But the Army Corps of Engineers and the U.S. Government have the responsibility to fund the cleanup. They have responsibility to fix the problem, and this report says it is so. It is time to do so.