



CONGRESSIONAL ATTEMPTS TO ADDRESS OCEAN DUMPING OF CHEMICAL WEAPONS IN HAWAII'S OCEANS H.R. 4778 AND S. 2295

Background

In 2001, the Army released a report called "Off-shore Disposal of Chemical Agents and Weapons conducted by the U.S." This report revealed that at least 8,000 tons of chemical weapons were dumped in the ocean around O'ahu from 1941 to 1971.

The Army contends that immediate clean up of the chemical weapons may not be required. The Army claims that chemical agents exposed to seawater are neutralized and thus pose no threat to the environment or the public's health. Moreover, the Army says immediate clean up of the chemical weapons is not possible because the Army does not know the exact location and condition of all the disposal sites. The Army released these findings in February 2006, in a report entitled "Military Sea Disposal Operations Near Hawai'i." The Army has promised to continue investigating the situation.

Proposed Legislation

On February 16, 2006, two congressional members from Hawai'i introduced twin bills in the House and Senate that would require the Army to conduct a survey and report to Congress on the feasibility of a clean up.

The bills (H.R. 4778/S. 2295) are commonly known as the "Ocean Dumping" bills. If passed, they would mandate the Army to conduct a survey of the chemical weapons dumped in the oceans around Hawai'i. The Army must:

- conduct a survey
- of known or believed chemical munitions disposal sites
- within 12 miles of the shore
- and report their findings to Congress by September 30, 2009.

The bills would also require the Army to:

- identify all known disposal sites on navigational maps,
- monitor these sites for the potential release of hazardous materials, and
- develop a research program to study the long-term effects of seawater on chemical munitions, potential public health risks and other environmental impacts.

The Army would also be required to outline the feasibility of cleaning up of the disposal sites. This would include an analysis of the cost of the clean up, the public health and environmental risks of clean up, and the risks to clean up personnel.