

Letter to the Editor, printed in the Akron Beacon Journal on Monday, January 14, 2002

Terrorists aren't the only source of toxic threat...

How incredibly ironic that following Sept. 11, Congress is willing to spend billions of dollars to protect citizens from potential danger from toxins and radiation that enemies from "without" might thrust upon us, yet, when the radiation or chemical threat happens to come from "within" - from our own government and industries - we receive no help or protection, only denial.

Likewise, we now hear people being called patriotic, even "heroes," if they take action to protect public health in the process of fighting terrorism. But when our citizens and others have dared to stand up to our own government in trying to protect our community surrounding the Uniontown Industrial Excess Landfill toxic waste dump, we have been treated by the government with great disdain and worse - we have been portrayed as the enemy.

Indeed, the apparent strategy used for many years by the federal Environmental Protection Agency has been to discredit anyone who expressed concern about the dangers posed by IEL. Early in 1991, the EPA smeared the independent labs that found man-made radiation, including deadly plutonium, in IEL samples.

People holding doctoral degrees and high-level officials alike were belittled when they stood up to the EPA. The citizens who came forward to report what they saw in the late 1960s and early '70s were mocked by the government and dismissed.

Ultimately, even the rubber companies' own data was played down last year, after test results indicated plutonium in the groundwater at IEL. Just a few weeks ago, it was revealed that the former landfill owner himself had come forward and admitted he buried nuclear material, plutonium, some 30 years ago for the U.S. government at IEL. Needless to say, he, too, was outrageously and unfairly discredited by the EPA and the Justice Department.

While citizens fighting all these years on the front lines in this battle are hardened to such double standards, we have found it especially difficult to take the government's hypocrisy in the wake of Sept. 11.

On Dec. 8, we wrote to the head of the EPA, Christie Todd Whitman, seeking answers as to why it and its legal representative, the Justice Department, were permitted to conduct the investigation into the landfill owner's testimony when the public has expressed wide-spread distrust of U.S. EPA for over a decade, accusing it of a major cover-up regarding the radiation at IEL.

We urge the public to contact as many congressional representatives as possible about what has been going on in Uniontown and demand that the government be responsive to protecting our citizens from not only toxic threats from terrorists, but "friendly fire".

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