

**Resolution from invited scientists at the open forum  
“Scientists respond to the ATSDR: A new look at the  
health and environmental situation in Vieques” held on  
October 30, 2009 in Casa Pueblo-Adjuntas,**

**PUERTO RICO**

**Preamble:** The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) conducted a series of health assessments pertaining to exposure pathways of contaminants into the population of Vieques. In general, ATSDR concluded that the presence of contaminants in Vieques did not pose a health hazard to its human population. However, their conclusions have been shown to be erroneous. In April of 2009, US congressmen Steve Rothman and Alan Grayston urged ATSDR to reopen the case of Vieques with specific recommendations to include scientific data generated by independent scientists from Puerto Rico and abroad. Scientists from Puerto Rico decided to review the scientific information regarding environmental, biological and health indicators in Vieques at an open forum in Casa Pueblo. From the conclusions reached during this forum, the following scientific resolution has been generated:

- **Whereas**, for more than 60 years the U.S. Navy used the largest proportion (2/3) of Vieques’ land for military target practices and ammunition/explosives storage; and
- Fully aware that these military activities are the major source of a plethora of contaminants of human and ecological health concern; and
- The sea floor in parts of Vieques is littered with U.S. Navy junk that includes unexploded ordnance, artillery shells and waste barrels that can affect the health of marine life and humans that depend on it; and
- Mindful that the exposure to contaminants from past military practices has occurred during a long period of time (chronic); and
- Considering that agricultural and industrial activities, curtailed by past military exercises, are not major sources of pollutants in Vieques; and
- Recognizing that ATSDR currently maintains its conclusions regarding the absence of any environmental and health risk in Vieques associated to past military practices; and
- Recognizing that ATSDR has agreed to reexamine its conclusions regarding the absence of any environmental and health risk in Vieques associated to past military practices; and
- Aware that ATSDR’s conclusions were derived from biased data and incorrect methods of data analyses; and
- Knowing that ATSDR’s Public Health Assessments (PHAs) excluded scientific data, some of which are published in peer-review scientific journals, documenting the flow

- of high levels of contaminants through the ecosystem representing a significant risk of human exposure that could impact the health of people in Vieques; and
- Recognizing that ATSDR refuses to withdraw the conclusions stated in the PHAs based on environmental evaluations on contaminants in soil, air, water, fish and shellfish; and
  - Conscious that the scientific community as well as US Congressmen have expressed distrust regarding ATSDR's PHAs; and
  - Recognizing that ATSDR has not accepted, neither has adequately answered the written critiques made by Puerto Rican scientists in 2001 to the methods, analyses and conclusions of the PHAs; and
  - Concerned that ATSDR disregarded the people of Vieques request for the withdrawal of the PHAs, the complaints toward this agency and the lack of credibility of the Puerto Rico Department of Health due to their lack of action concerning health services in Vieques; and
  - Concerned that the sea floor in parts of Vieques is littered with US Navy junk that includes unexploded ordnance, artillery shells, and waste barrels that can affect the health of marine life and humans that depend on it; and
  - Concerned that the practice of burning vegetation and open-detonation of unexploded ordnance in the former live impact area could release significant amount of pollutants that could reach the population of Vieques; and
  - Fully aware that the population of Vieques have shown higher incidence of various types of health problems, including cancer, in comparison to mainland Puerto Rico; and
  - Recognizing that environmental and exposure assessment studies conducted in Vieques have demonstrated the pathway for contaminants (e.g., metals) to reach the Vieques population; and
  - Concerned that many environmental contaminants (e.g. explosive-derived organic chemicals) from past military activities that have not been fully studied, may have reached the Vieques population; and
  - Disturbed that ATSDR concluded that there is no health risk from exposure to military contaminants; and

Be it resolved that having considered during this open forum the strengths and limitations of the data generated by studies on the health and environment in Vieques, as presented by Dr. Jorge Colón, Dr. Cruz María Nazario, Dr. Carmen Ortiz Roque, Dr. Carmen Colón de Jorge, Dr. Imar Mansilla-Rivera, Dr. Carlos J. Rodríguez-Sierra and Dr. Arturo Massol-Deyá, we

1. Affirm that the population of Vieques are exposed to contaminants (e.g., metals) at levels that could pose health problems leading to higher cancer and non-cancer health effects being experienced on Vieques;
2. Recognize that known pollutants (e.g., metals) move through the food web and attain higher concentrations, thus extending the problem from a local source to a regional scale; even beyond the Live Impact Area from Vieques;
3. Affirm that other military-derived pollutants (e.g., organic chemicals) may have reached the population of Vieques;
4. Call upon the ATSDR to immediately withdraw the PHAs' conclusion that exposure from contaminants poses no health risk in Vieques while it undergoes the process of reevaluating its results;
5. Request the inclusion of biomonitoring of contaminants in future studies, particularly for susceptible population (e.g., children and women of reproductive age);
6. Support the Vieques Legislature petition to the Environmental Quality Board (EQB) (known in spanish as the "Junta de Calidad Ambiental") of Puerto Rico not to concede a waiver to the US Navy to continue the open detonation and burning of vegetation in the Live Impact Area;
7. Demand the cessation of the practice of burning of vegetation and open-detonation being conducted in the former Live Impact Area, since data showed that plants have the capacity to accumulate significant amounts of toxic metals that could reach the population of Vieques via atmosphere, as well as to contaminate adjacent aquatic systems;
8. Demand clean up goals and methods that guarantee the efficient removal of contaminants to no hazard levels;
9. Call for the clean up of coastal waters of Vieques affected by military artifacts debris that include unexploded ordnance, bombs, and barrels with unknown contents;
10. Request a full disclosure of all the contaminants; chemical, biological, and physical, used for more than 60 years;
11. Recommend the improvement of data gathering regarding the registry of cancer and other health problems in Vieques to determine trends in the health profile of the population -with particular attention to vulnerable groups (i.e., women of reproductive age, children), assign adequate resources and access to health facilities in Vieques and improve early detection and appropriate treatment for the Vieques population.