

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

January 31, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Secretary Austin,

I write to draw your attention to the risk hexavalent chromium and similar hazardous chemicals pose to the health of American servicemembers and civilian personnel at Department of Defense installations, and to the need to address deferred or unmet facility repairs that may exacerbate health risks to those working at these installations.

Department of Defense activities that feature hexavalent chromium hazards and similar risks include aircraft maintenance, such as the removal of paint and primer during aircraft maintenance and the application of new surface coatings. The CDC considers hexavalent chromium compounds occupational carcinogens, and these chemicals are regulated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA).

Despite efforts by commanders to mitigate these potentially harmful effects, I am concerned that an unacceptable level of risk is being assumed at our installations. Much of this unnecessary risk appears to be due to unmet facilities sustainment, restoration, and modernization requirements, particularly those associated with aging and inadequate aircraft maintenance facilities.

Our servicemembers volunteer knowing that there are risks associated with military service. However, preventable and unnecessary occupational health risks to American servicemembers are unacceptable. Accordingly, I request responses to the following questions:

1. Does the Department of Defense regularly evaluate the nature and prevalence of hexavalent chromium, isocyanic acid, hexamethylene ester, and similar hazards at installations of the Department, particularly those installations associated with equipment, vehicle, and aircraft maintenance and sustainment activities and, if so, what is the current nature and prevalence of such hazards?
2. Can the Department of Defense confirm whether those equipment, vehicle, and aircraft maintenance facilities, carrying out activities not “uniquely military,” comply or align with OSHA regulations related to hexavalent chromium and similar hazards?
3. What actions has the Department of Defense taken to mitigate the health risks associated with exposure to these hazards and how does the Department assess the efficacy of such mitigation measures?

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4. Does the Department of Defense collect data on servicemembers whose health has been, or may have been, negatively impacted by exposure to hexavalent chromium and similar hazards?
5. How do unmet requirements related to military construction or facilities sustainment, restoration, and modernization impact the nature, prevalence, and mitigation of chemical hazards in activities of the Department of Defense, and what additional authorities or resources are needed to address these requirements?
6. Can the Department provide a full and specific accounting of those facilities which require repair, modernization, or replacement in order to comply or align with relevant OSHA standards and protect military servicemember health?

Thank you for a prompt response to this inquiry.

Sincerely,



Jon Ossoff
United States Senator