

**Fayetteville Observer, September 19, 2010**

Brad Miller wants to know what went wrong with the water at Camp Lejeune. We're glad he's asking. Maybe a congressman can get answers that the public hasn't been able to find.

Miller, a Democrat from Raleigh, chairs an oversight committee of the House Science & Technology Committee. The panel began a hearing Thursday to find out why an earlier investigation of water-supply pollution at the Jacksonville Marine base omitted any reference to the benzene that contaminated drinking water there for years and may have caused cancer in many Marine veterans and their families.

Government investigators may have known about the benzene for more than a decade, but it went unreported. Miller said Thursday that Navy and Marine Corps leaders have been "relying on the advice of lawyers, hiding behind science that is slow and uncertain, and spending more energy on public relations than on helping Marines and their families."

We wish we could hear that sense of outrage here in Cumberland County. State officials have known about benzene contamination in private wells in Gray's Creek at least since the late 1980s. But county officials said they didn't become aware of it until two years ago, largely because of an extensive Observer report on the problem.

Residents have been using bottled water, but the state and county have yet to even complete a plan to bring safe municipal water supplies to the area, let alone actually build a system. That's probably years away. The county commissioners will meet Monday afternoon to get an engineering update on water options for the area. The meeting, at 4 p.m., will be televised live on Time Warner Cable's Channel 7.

And over at Fort Bragg, there may be another kind of contamination issue. Or maybe not - it's still unclear. After 10 unexplained infant deaths in post housing in recent years, federal officials have launched an investigation into whether environmental contaminants may be a cause. One housing unit where a child died may have had some contaminated, toxic Chinese drywall in it, according to one test.

Post officials are holding open meetings for residents and have repeatedly reassured the people who live in base housing that they are safe. That's what they said about the water on Camp Lejeune, too. We'd feel more comfortable if post leaders would hold their reassurances until extensive environmental testing is concluded.

And we'd feel much, much more comfortable if our leaders at every level of government would be far more vigilant about the chemicals that find their way into our air and water. Clean air and water - especially drinking water - should be a fundamental protection that all Americans enjoy.