



CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20318-9999

7 February 2011

The Honorable Bill Nelson
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Nelson,

The Secretary of Defense has asked me to respond to your letter regarding the use of burn pits in Iraq and Afghanistan. I share your concern for the welfare of our deployed personnel and assure you that significant progress has been made to minimize burn pit exposure risks such as those described in your letter. All open-air burn pits in Iraq were closed by the end of 2010. These closures were made possible in part by the consolidation and reduction in U.S. forces during the drawdown and the installation of additional incinerators.

No open-air burn pits in operation in Afghanistan are used for the disposal of covered waste as addressed in the Under Secretary of Defense for Acquisition, Technology, and Logistics Directive-Type Memorandum (DTM) 09-032 -- Use of Open-air Burn Pits in Contingency Operations. The U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM) is currently procuring, installing, and operating approximately 200 solid waste incinerators at U.S. bases in Afghanistan. USCENTCOM also issued an environmental regulation that establishes additional waste management requirements including conditions and timelines for burn pit closures in Afghanistan. Occupational health and respiratory protection measures vary and are based on individual site conditions, the duration of exposure, and the severity of the hazard.

We are in the process of gathering additional information and within the next 60 days will identify ways to promote greater access and use of protective equipment to further mitigate burn pit concerns. Local commanders are also ensuring burn pits are operated in a safe, secure area and inspected regularly.

The safety and welfare of our deployed men and women remain the highest priority. Your continued concern and support for our men and women in uniform are appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M. G. Mullen", is written over a horizontal line.

M. G. MULLEN
Admiral, U.S. Navy