

Seeing ads about Camp Lejeune? What to know about the toxic water and deadline to sue

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Camp Lejeune made national news after President Joe Biden signed into law a way for veterans and their families to seek justice after being

exposed to deadly toxins from the base's water sources.

Then commercials began flooding the airwaves with information, sometimes true and sometimes false, about how people who suffered from [health conditions](#) due to being exposed to the water's contamination can benefit from filing claims and lawsuits.

"If you served or worked on Camp Lejeune, you may have been exposed to polluted drinking water that causes cancer or other serious health issues and now you may be eligible for substantial compensation," one commercial from The Sam Bernstein Law Firm states.

It's a lot to digest both for former Marines and their families and for people curious about the base itself.

Here is a breakdown of what you need to know:

Where is Camp Lejeune?

It's in Jacksonville, North Carolina, about 130 miles southeast of Raleigh.

What is Camp Lejeune?

Camp Lejeune is a 156,000-acre military training facility, created in 1942, that borders the Atlantic Ocean and the New River. The site is huge, with 450 miles of roads and 6,946 buildings, according to the Defense Department.

What is Camp Lejeune's population?

The Defense Department says more than 137,500 Marines, sailors,

retirees, their families and civilian employees use Camp Lejeune.

What happened on Camp Lejeune?

Two [water treatment plants](#) supplying water to the base became contaminated with trichloroethylene, perchloroethylene, benzene and vinyl chloride, deadly chemicals known to cause 15 health issues including miscarriages, birth defects, cancers and leukemia.

The chemicals came from underground fuel storage tanks, an off-base dry cleaning facility, industrial area spills and waste disposal sites.

The chemicals then seeped through the ground and into the base's water treatment plants.

When did the contamination happen?

Between Aug. 1, 1953 and Dec. 31, 1987.

What are the 15 presumptive health conditions?

The military presumes that if you were on Camp Lejeune during the time of the water contamination and you have been diagnosed with one of these 15 conditions, it was because of your service to the military.

Those include:

- Bladder cancer
- Breast cancer
- Esophageal cancer
- Female infertility
- Hepatic steatosis

- Kidney cancer
- Leukemia
- Lung cancer
- Miscarriage
- Multiple myeloma
- Myelodysplastic syndromes
- Neurobehavioral effects
- Non-Hodgkin's lymphoma
- Renal toxicity
- Scleroderma

Why are so many commercials happening now?

Until August 2022, a federal law protected the military from being sued if someone was injured on active duty. Veterans and other victims of the base's toxic waters also didn't learn about the contamination until after the time allowed to file a lawsuit.

In August, Congress passed and Biden signed into law the PACT Act, which made myriad changes to help veterans, including giving two years for people affected by the water on Camp Lejeune to file claims with the U.S. Navy. If the Navy did not respond to the claims or offered unsatisfactory settlements, the PACT Act also gave victims the ability to sue. But with only a two-year window, lawyers are working fast to find victims and file suits, creating a deluge of commercials on television.

What changes were needed for victims to be able to sue?

The PACT Act removed the time factor for veterans trying to file claims after learning about the contamination. The bill also took away the government's immunity.

How much money are victims set to receive?

The Camp Lejeune claims are expected to produce the largest civil case in U.S. history. As of April 26, more than 500,000 claims had been filed under the PACT Act, which included not only the Camp Lejeune water contamination, but also veterans exposed to burn pits and other [hazardous substances](#) while serving in certain areas. Since the Camp Lejeune water contamination is a novel case, there's no way of determining a dollar figure yet.

How long will litigation take?

That's also unclear. District Judge James Dever, who is assigned to the case, says about 20 lawsuits are being filed a day in the U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of North Carolina just related to Camp Lejeune's water toxicity. He said at that rate it would take four judges about 1,900 years to hear all of the cases. He promised to act quickly and listen to all concerned to figure out the best way to handle the caseload.

Are the commercials predatory?

They can be, if they're making promises they can't keep, such as to secure a certain amount of funding, or to represent people who don't fall under the aggrieved class.

But the commercials can also benefit victims who wouldn't otherwise know that the water was contaminated, that their disease may have stemmed from the water or that they have only two years to file a claim.

How to avoid being scammed

The Veterans of Foreign Wars sent a guide to its members to help them

avoid being scammed by predatory law firms.

Among other characteristics, it advises looking for a law firm that caps lawyers' fees at reasonable rates and offers no upfront costs.

Can only veterans file a claim?

No, claimants can include both those who lived on or worked on the base, including civilian family members or employees.

When is the deadline to file a claim?

Aug. 10, 2024.

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