



# Bagram Theater Internment Facility (BTIF)

FACT SHEET 64-017-1111

**Purpose:** To describe the assessment of occupational and environmental health (OEH) exposures to U.S. personnel at the Bagram Theater Internment Facility (BTIF) at Bagram Air Field (BAF), Afghanistan.

## SYNOPSIS:

Located on the base camp known as Bagram Air Field (BAF), the BTIF was the primary detention facility for Afghanistan from 2002-2009. Originally a Soviet aircraft metal plating facility, it was converted by U.S. forces into the BTIF in 2002 timeframe. Due to its previous industrial use, the building was surveyed and sampled for asbestos and heavy metals to assess potential hazards to U.S. personnel working in the facility. Areas thought to be potentially contaminated were closed off to personnel. The results of a 2004 sampling study indicated the presence of some heavy metals in occupied areas of the facility but these were below levels of any health concern. Though the health risk was low, follow-up sampling was performed to ensure conditions did not change.

No indication of a long term health risk from exposure to industrial materials was ever identified for this facility. However, information was included in the medical records of some personnel who worked at the BTIF at the time of the investigation. This medical documentation was provided to inform those personnel of the Army's efforts, especially given the heightened concerns at the time. This documentation did not associate exposures to any medical conditions, provide for disability, or direct health care providers to conduct any tests.

By 2010 detention operations had been moved to a new facility called the "Detention Facility in Parwan (DFIP)." The BTIF facility itself has been demolished. While no health risks have been associated with the BTIF, some personnel previously deployed to the BAF base camp have contacted the PHC with exposure concerns. Some concerns are in regards to the BTIF specifically, but there are also concerns regarding other ambient airborne exposures at the BAF base camp (such as from dust and burn pits).

A recent document referred to as the BAF Periodic Occupational and Environmental Monitoring Summary (POEMS) provides the official assessment of health hazards identified at the overall BAF base camp including the BTIF. The POEMS does not indicate the need for any specific post-deployment medical evaluations, testing, or continued medical surveillance. POEMS are now developed to provide healthcare providers with information regarding potential exposures at deployment sites; especially when no individual medical documentation is warranted. Personnel with concerns regarding exposures at the BTIF or BAF locations may find it useful to give this factsheet or the BAF POEMS to their healthcare providers.

## Background:

DOD policy requires the collection and assessment of OEH data from deployment base camps to ensure hazards are identified, associated risks are characterized, and that any medical follow up or surveillance is performed. This includes sampling and assessment of various media to include air, soil, water, or 'bulk' samples of dust or unknown materials. Sampling is performed to assess overall population exposure levels at base camps, though specific locations and facilities may become the focus of a specific investigation. This is the case of the assessment of the BTIF.

The BTIF assessment is a single component of a much larger official DOD base camp OEH assessment referred to as the BAF **Periodic Occupational and Environmental Monitoring Summary (POEMS)**. The POEMS describes overall BAF basecamp exposure data and population health risks. It is based on information (e.g., sampling data, field surveys, country and area-specific information on endemic diseases, and other hazard information such as on noise and heat/cold stress) collected from January 2002 through October 2010. While it does not represent any single person's unique exposure experience, it may be useful to providers and others regarding potential population health effects and associated medical implications.

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## **Bagram Air Base (aka Bagram Air Field (BAF))**

Site Description. BAF is a military airport and housing complex in the northwestern Parwan province of Afghanistan ~30 miles north of Kabul. The airfield is 38,000 acres with three large hangars, control tower, and numerous support buildings. Many buildings had originally been used or constructed by the Soviet during the 1980s. While many buildings have been demolished over the years, some old structures are still used by U.S. and Allied Forces. New buildings continue to be constructed at the site.

Mission and Personnel. In June 2002, BAF was home to more than 7,000 U.S. and other armed services. By 2010 the population estimate was 30,000. The base is run by a U.S. Army division; but half of the base is under Air Force control (flight line and area involving air mission resources). The BAF is home to primarily U.S. Army and Air Force personnel, but U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Coast Guard and NATO partner units are also present.

Environmental and OEH Health Conditions. BAF is semi-arid with snow and rain concentrated in winter months. Temperatures can vary widely from 70 to 91 °F in the summer months, to winter months ranging from -19 to 50 °F. Strong winds create intense dust storms and high levels of windblown dust and associated particulate matter (PM) - especially during the spring and summer. The PM and smoke from the BAF burn pit have been identified as key environmental health concerns at BAF. Military preventive medicine personnel have assessed these and other potentially hazardous exposures at BAF to include various endemic diseases, heat, and noise. Sampling results of the PM levels indicate levels that exceed health guidelines. This supports claims of eye and respiratory tract irritation or cough while at the location. Scientific literature indicates that especially with the smaller PM fraction, more serious effects or an increased risk of chronic respiratory conditions are possible in the elderly or those with pre-existing health conditions (e.g., asthma, other respiratory conditions, or cardiopulmonary disease). Various ongoing studies are further evaluating the potential risk of respiratory conditions in the deployed military population. **See the BAF POEMS, 2011.**



## **The Bagram Theater Internment Facility (BTIF)**

The BTIF was converted from its original Soviet construction into a detention facility in the early phase of Operation Enduring Freedom. By 2002 it was the primary U.S. detention facility for the Afghanistan area. It was also referred to as the Prisoner Confinement Facility (PCF), Bagram Collection Point (BCP), or the Bagram Holding Area. By the mid 2000s, the BTIF was a focus of media attention due to claims of abusive treatment of prisoners.

Only certain rooms within the old Soviet facility were occupied as part of BTIF operations; these included administrative office space used by USA personnel as well as areas used for detainees. Other rooms in the facility were unoccupied/restricted/sealed to prevent exposures from occurring. Because of its previous industrial use, the building was sampled for asbestos and heavy metals to assess potential hazards to U.S. personnel working in the facility. Initial sampling occurred in 2002. A large scale sampling study conducted in 2004 identified the presence of heavy metals (e.g., Arsenic, Barium, Beryllium, Cadmium, Chromium, Lead, Manganese, Nickel, Selenium, Strontium, and Vanadium) in bulk and wipe samples of dust. These heavy metals are naturally found in the local soil as well. While in larger amounts, these metals can become toxic; in smaller amounts many of these metals are necessary to support life. The presence of these metals in soil, dust or air does not mean a person has inhaled/absorbed/ingested enough to achieve toxic levels. A semi-quantitative analysis of the 2004 BTIF data performed by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (now USAPHC) determined that the health risk of potential adverse effects amongst those who worked at the BTIF was no higher than would normally be expected amongst the U.S. population. Subsequent sampling conducted in 2006, 2007, and 2008 included bulk dust samples as well as air-sampling from the unoccupied, sealed-off rooms as well as air samples from the occupied areas. While bulk dust samples from the sealed areas were positive for heavy metal dusts, all the air samples were below applicable health criteria confirming that the airborne exposures did not present a health concern. Per above BAF description, however, personnel living and working at the BAF base camp itself were likely to have had ambient airborne environmental exposures to particulate matter that present some health risk concerns.

## **Additional Information**

Though neither the BTIF nor BAF OEH assessments have indicated the need for any specific post-deployment medical evaluations, testing, or continued medical surveillance, if you were deployed to Bagram Air Field and have concerns regarding exposures you experienced while there, you are encouraged to obtain a copy of the BAF POEMS (available at <https://mesl.apgea.army.mil/mesl/>) OR you may directly contact the Environmental Medicine Program.

We also have staff trained in environmental medicine available to directly address issues with your physician or health care provider: [USAPHC-EnvironmentalMedicineProgram@AMEDD.army.mil](mailto:USAPHC-EnvironmentalMedicineProgram@AMEDD.army.mil) 410-436-2714