

# Environmentalist skeptical of studies done by ATSDR

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Visiting environmental activist Linda Price King, who met with Vieques community groups over the weekend, said Tuesday she is skeptical of any studies conducted by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry analyzing the impact of Navy activities on the environment.

"[The ATSDR] has a long history of deliberately misleading results on the effects of toxic pollution on public health," she said. "We should not trust the federal government to study itself."

Price King is the executive director of the Environmental Health Network in Washington, D.C., and was invited to visit Vieques by the Caribbean Project on Justice and Peace. Her visit also was coordinated through the University of Puerto Rico Public Health School at the Medical Sciences campus.

With over 20 years experience in environmental activism,

Price King began in the early 1980s by fighting to clean up her community in Nitro, W. Va, which was surrounded by six nitro-glycerin, chemical and pesticide plants.

Since that time, she has worked to help clean up other communities around the world, including Eastern Europe and the Ukraine, near the Chernobyl nuclear plant, which blew up in 1986.

Price also co-edited "Inconclusive by Design," published in May 1992, which charges that the ATSDR and the Centers for Disease Control have deliberately misled the American public on the effects of toxic pollution exposure.

The report includes a study of a Superfund site in St. Gabriel, La., in which the ATSDR allegedly withheld data on miscarriages by African-American women, and another study on a landfill in North Carolina, in which the ATSDR allegedly withheld health data on local residents living in certain zip codes near the landfill.

The ATSDR and the CDC have denied the charges.

Price King said she will discuss with Vieques community groups and local physicians on how to physically map toxic sites and track disease patterns.

The ATSDR has conducted several studies examining potential pathways from military activities to civilians through the air, water and food that Vieques residents consume. The Public Health Assessments were petitioned by a single resident from the small island.

The studies all found contamination, but ATSDR said levels were not high enough to be a concern.

A groundwater and drinking water survey, released in 2001, included an analysis of the island's drinking water, which is pumped in from the main island through an underwater pipe.

Traces of the compounds benzene and toluene, which are used in explosive ordnance, were found in the groundwater, but the agency said the source of the compounds was unknown.



STAR PHOTO BY CESAR SILVA

Environmental activist Linda Price King warns Vieques residents to be wary of testing conducted by the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry.

"It's unknown only to the ATSDR," said Scott Edwards, a lawyer with the coalition of groups led by Robert E. Kennedy Jr that is suing the Navy.

ATSDR's findings also contradict numerous studies by other scientists, which found that high levels of contamination from Navy activities are entering the food chain.

A survey by University of Puerto Rico biologist Alexis Massol found levels of cadmium — which the Navy has admitted discharging at 240 times the legal limit — at thousands of times above health guidelines in fiddler crabs from the target range.

Following ATSDR's release of a study of Vieques fish and shellfish, agency officials said they "were not so interested" in crabs from the range because "people don't go there."

The Environmental Protection Agency, which is guiding the Navy's investigations and cleanups, relies on the ATSDR reports to determine the health impacts of potential contamination.

Staff writer Jon Rust contributed to this report.

## U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION NATIONAL MARINE FISHERIES SERVICE

### NOTICE OF PUBLIC MEETING OF THE CARIBBEAN FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL

The Caribbean Fishery Management Council, established by Section 302 of the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act of 1976 (Public Law 94-265, as amended) known as the Magnuson-Stevens Act, will hold its 111<sup>th</sup> regular meeting to discuss the Sustainable Fisheries Act (SFA) Comprehensive Amendment, and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for Essential Fish Habitat (EFH), among other topics.

The Council will convene on Tuesday, March 25, 2003, from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and the Administrative Committee from 4:15 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. The Council will reconvene on Wednesday, March 26, 2003, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., approximately.

The meeting will take place at the Conference Room of the Wyndham Sugar Bay Beach Club and Resort, in St. Thomas, USVI.

The meeting is open to the public and will be conducted in English. Fishers and other interested persons are invited to attend and participate with oral or written statements regarding the following agenda items. Although non-emergency issues not contained in this agenda may come before this group for discussion, those issues may not be the subject of formal action during this

# Breast cancer: Prevention important for both sexes

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doctor's orders and that was when he learned he was the statistical one man to 103 women to have breast cancer.

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