FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE,
November 18, 2026

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Illinois Officials Monitoring Planned Detonation at Middletown, Iowa Army Ammunition Plant

Springfield – The Illinois Environmental Protection Agency (Illinois EPA) is sharing information to ensure Illinois residents are aware of a controlled detonation planned for Friday, November 20, 2026 at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant in Middletown, Iowa. The U.S. Army has issued a public advisory for Iowa residents of the planned detonation of degraded lead azide, which is expected to result in lead dust becoming airborne. Based on current air modeling, this could impact Mercer County, Illinois. The U.S. Army will update its models prior and following the detonation, which could alter the potentially impacted Illinois communities. While U.S. Army officials have indicated extensive monitoring for the potential impact from airborne lead dust, no information on the breadth of methodology of this monitoring has been shared with Illinois officials to date.

"The Department of Defense has an important responsibility to ensure its operations do not jeopardize the health of Illinois residents or the quality of our environment," said Illinois EPA Director James Jennings. "As we witnessed during this summer's wildfire season, air pollution does not respect state lines and accordingly we strongly urge the Department of Defense to conduct comprehensive post-detonation environmental sampling, including air, soil, and surface dust testing in potentially impacted areas of Illinois, publicly share those results, and take all appropriate steps to address any impacts from this event."

"There is no safe level of lead in the body, and when inhaled or swallowed, it can pose serious health risks," said Dr. Sameer Vohra, Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health. "Illinois residents who may be affected by the detonation can stay safe by staying indoors and keeping windows closed for 24-48 hours. Washing your hands prior to eating and drinking, as well as washing outdoor surfaces with soap and water are ways to minimize exposure and limit the risk of tracking toxic residue into homes. We will continue to work with the Illinois EPA and local health departments to protect the safety of Illinois from the health risks associated from toxic lead."

The U.S. Army advisory states the detonation has been coordinated with and is permitted by U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 7 under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act, noting this is the safest way to remove the lead azide from the site. Iowa is located within U.S. EPA Region 7, and Illinois is located within U.S. EPA Region 5. Illinois EPA was not notified of the planned detonation by U.S. EPA Region 7 but has been in contact with U.S. EPA Region 5 to obtain additional information on the modeling and planned air sampling.

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The U.S. Army has released two maps to indicate possible exposure due to the planned detonation but did not include what conditions that modeling included. The maps were designed to reflect airborne exposure due to inhalation of lead dust and exposure from lead dust on surfaces. Portions of western Illinois are currently included in that modeling. The U.S. Army will provide updates to the maps at 48 hours prior to the detonation, six hours prior to, and every hour thereafter until detonation. Maps will be posted at: https://www.army.mil/asc#org-iowa-army-ammunition-plant.

Lead is toxic to humans and animals. Accordingly, the Illinois EPA encourages members of the public to follow all relevant public health guidance to limit potential exposure. The Illinois Department of Public Health has provided the following safety tips:

- Stay indoors and keep windows closed for 24 to 48 hours after the detonation.
- It's okay to run the furnace at home. Most residential furnaces recirculate air already inside your home. If you have an HVAC system that actively draws in outside air, like a school or commercial building, then you may want to temporarily close the intake and switch to recirculate.
- Use a portable air cleaner to supplement your furnace filter.
- Monitor local news coverage for updates on the location of the plume. The Army will post updates on its website: https://www.army.mil/asc#org-iowa-army-ammunition-plant.
- Wash outdoor surfaces when you see visible dust using soap and water.
- If you need to drive through an area impacted by dust, set your car's AC/Heater to recirculate. Afterward, you can take your car to the car wash and replace the cabin filter, if needed. A high efficiency cabin filter will capture fine particulate matter.
- Visit your doctor if you have health concerns.
    - Lead is a toxic metal that is harmful if inhaled or swallowed and can pose serious health risks. There is no safe level of lead that has been identified, and it is especially dangerous to children six years of age and younger. If you are concerned that you or your child have been exposed to lead, please contact your doctor about having a blood lead test.
- Remember to wash your hands before eating and drinking and take your shoes off at the entrance of homes to minimize tracking.

Areas immediately adjacent to the detonation site will be temporarily evacuated. All of those areas are in Iowa.

The Illinois EPA will be closely observing data from its northern Illinois air monitoring network to identify any information indicating impacts to Illinois communities. The Agency will also independently evaluate the modeling data to determine whether current conditions indicate a larger number of Illinois communities than the federal government has noted should take appropriate precautionary steps. These efforts will supplement air monitoring activities undertaken by U.S. EPA Regions 5 and 7.

A FAQ document is also available from the U.S. Army. Residents can file a claim against the U.S. Army for any alleged property damage done because of the detonation. See FAQ document for details on submitting a claim.

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