

# Troops Likely Exposed to Toxic Hazards at K2 in Uzbekistan

## Military personnel stationed at Karshi-Khanabad Air Base in Uzbekistan during the Afghanistan War were likely exposed to multiple toxic hazards

Aug 31, 2022

Operation Enduring Freedom veterans who were stationed at an air base in Uzbekistan during the early years of the Afghanistan War may have been exposed to many different toxins, according to the Department of Defense.

Karshi-Khanabad Air Base was in operation from 2001 to 2005. More commonly known as K2, as well as Camp Stronghold Freedom, the base was located in the southeastern portion of Uzbekistan, which is north of Afghanistan. K2 occupied about 1-square-mile near the border of Tajikistan. The base currently is occupied by the Uzbekistan Air Force.

In total, at least 15,777 U.S. troops were deployed to K2, according to the Stronghold Freedom Foundation. At any given time, as many as 1,300 military members were stationed at the base, stated the foundation, which focuses on advocating for the troops who passed through K2.

### **TOXINS AT KARSHI-KHANABAD**

Troops at K2 were likely exposed to multiple toxic hazards, according to DOD documents that were unclassified in 2020.

One such toxin is petroleum. Another hazard is particulate matter, which is from both natural and manmade sources, according to an Army document. Sources of particulate matter exposure include:

- Windblown dusts
- Fires
- Construction activities
- Factories

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Exposure to tetrachloroethylene also was identified as a possible toxin in the DOD documents. Tetrachloroethylene could have been used as a degreaser for machinery and equipment.

The declassified DOD documents also stated that “up to 100 percent” of troops stationed at K2 were exposed to radiation.

### **VFW SUPPORTS TOXIC EXPOSURE REFORM**

In March, then-VFW Commander-in-Chief Matthew M. “Fritz” Mihelcic told lawmakers that bipartisan support is needed for two pending bills. If made into law, the legislation would improve VA’s care for veterans suffering from toxic exposure.

During a hearing with the House and Senate VA committees, Mihelcic asked Congress to pass the Comprehensive and Overdue Support for Troops of War Act of 2021 (S. 3003) and Honoring our Promise To Address Comprehensive Toxics Act of 2021 (H.R. 3967).

“For generations, veterans have returned home from war with an array of unexplained health conditions and illnesses associated with the toxic exposures and environmental hazards they encountered in service,” Mihelcic said. “Today is no different, and toxic exposure has become synonymous with military service.”

**UPDATE: After months of VFW advocacy, the Honoring Our PACT Act was passed and then signed into law by President Biden on Aug. 10. Read the VFW's full press release [here](#).**

*This article is featured in the 2022 August issue of [VFW magazine](#), and was written by [Dave Spiva](#), associate editor for VFW magazine.*