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Iowa Army Ammunition Plant lead azide detonation: full report

Prepared 2026-11-25 2100Z Last revised 2026-11-25 2118Z Post-event data is preliminary; corrections are dated on the briefing page.

Action level: monitor (real but contained; watch the signals) **Confidence:** moderate

Evidence tags used in this report:

- **[P]** Primary document (government or court record), read directly.
- **[M]** Media report only.
- **[U]** Unverified, or sources conflict.

Primary sources are linked to their original URLs. Where an archived copy is available, it is linked as well.

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1. The event

On 2026-11-25 the U.S. Army carried out a controlled, in-place detonation of 68 drums of degraded lead azide. The site was the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant (IAAAP) in Middletown, Des Moines County, Iowa. The Army acted under an EPA emergency hazardous-waste permit, after a federal appeals court lifted a short administrative stay.

Missouri was involved only through precautionary monitoring. EPA screened air quality across Missouri for this Iowa blast. ABC17 puts the plant about 60 miles from the Missouri line (ABC17/KMIZ, 2026-11-25 [M]). St. Louis is roughly 170 miles south-southeast in a straight line (approximate, by map). That is outside every published plume map.

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2. Situation

ITEM	FACT	SOURCE
What	Controlled detonation of 68 drums of degraded lead azide, a primary explosive used to initiate munitions. The waste is classed as D003 (reactive) and D008 (lead toxicity).	EPA emergency permit, pp. 1–2, 2026-11-13 [P]
Where	IAAAP, 17571 Des Moines County Hwy 79, Middletown, Iowa, a site of about 19,000 acres. The drums were detonated in place inside two earth-covered magazines (bunkers).	Permit p. 1 [P]; EPA Region 7 letter to Gov. Reynolds, 2026-11-20 [P]
When	Scheduled for about 09:00 CST on Wednesday 2026-11-25, which is **about 1500Z**. The Army and ABC report it took place at about 9 a.m. CT. No official to-the-second time has been published.	Army advisory, 2026-11-24 [P]; ABC News, 2026-11-25 [M]
How	Charges and an accelerant were placed on and near each container. They were detonated "simultaneously or in rapid succession." Media report two shots.	Permit Condition IV.B, p. 9 [P]; ABC 2026-11-25 [M]
Quantity	**[U] The figures conflict.** The Army's figure is about 9,500 lb, as cited by Earthjustice. The Acting Army Secretary said "nearly 9,700 lb" (via ABC). A sworn declaration by Col. Aaron Teller gives 9,773.5 lb (via Military.com). The permit redacts its quantity line.	Earthjustice, 2026-11-19 [M]; ABC 2026-11-25 [M]; Military.com, 2026-11-23 [M]
Mitigation	Sand barriers about two stories high, HESCO walls, a "water wall" of thousands of gallons, gel blocks and aqueous foam. Also Department of Energy ballistic gels and foams, and misters to wet the soil.	Army advisory 2026-11-24 [P]; EPA Region 7 letter [P]; DOJ notice and Shirley declaration, 2026-11-23 [P]
Protective actions	Army and FEMA relocated residents of Middletown and a **5-mile cone southwest** of the plant, plus 1 mile beyond the modeled path, starting Nov 24. Lodging was provided through Nov 27. Residents outside the zone were told to shelter in place. **[M] Reported change:** about an hour before the blast, a FEMA alert reportedly told residents within **20 miles** (Middletown, Augusta, Burlington) to shelter in place rather than evacuate. The text of the alert has not been located.	Army advisory 2026-11-24 [P]; PBS NewsHour live, 2026-11-25 [M]
Declarations	Iowa activated its emergency operations center on Nov 20. Gov. Reynolds proclaimed a disaster for Des Moines, Lee and Van Buren counties on Nov 24. Missouri activated its emergency operations center on Nov 24. The FAA issued flight restriction FDC 6/9186.	KCRG, 2026-11-24 [M]; KCRG, 2026-11-24 [M]; FAA TFR [P]

ITEM	FACT	SOURCE
Immediate result	EPA: "One hour after the controlled mitigated detonation... all... real-time air monitors are reporting zero detection of airborne lead throughout the region." About 300 EPA staff and contractors were pre-positioned. About 1,200 baseline samples of air, land, dust and water were taken before the blast.	EPA news release, 2026-11-25 [P]
Army outcome claim	Maj. Gen. Shirley said the material was destroyed with no secondary explosions. Acting Secretary Telle said the threat of spontaneous detonation was "eliminated." Neither claim is yet independently confirmed. Wikipedia, citing the New York Times, reports that drone checks were planned and that more detonations "may be needed."	PBS live 2026-11-25 [M]; Wikipedia, as of 2026-11-25 [M]
Missouri	33 EPA screening locations in Missouri, 8 of them in northeast Missouri, had no detections. Missouri DNR contacted the 10 surface-water systems (13 intakes) within 100 miles.	ABC17 2026-11-25 [M]; Missouri DNR page, updated 2026-11-25 [P]

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3. Context: how it was found and what led up to it

A routine inspection found it. It was not an accident or a tip. The Army says a "routine monitoring inspection on March 11, 2026" found the stored lead azide had "partially crystallized." That made it more sensitive to friction, shock and cold (Army advisory, 2026-11-24 [P]).

The court summarizes the cause: changes to the water and ethanol storage solution let the lead azide recrystallize (8th Circuit opinion, 2026-11-23 [P]). Maj. Gen. Shirley's sworn declaration adds three points (2026-11-23 [P]):

- The barrel lids could no longer be removed safely, so the solution could not be topped up.
- That left the solution more prone to freezing.
- Freezing "can cause an unintended detonation."

How long the material was stored. [U] Accounts conflict.

- Shirley declaration: "stored at IAAAP since 2009."
- 8th Circuit opinion: "for over two decades."
- KCRG, citing Army and DoD documents, reports that concerns about deterioration date to a 2004 environmental assessment (KCRG, 2026-11-24 [M]).
- An Army solicitation titled "Lead Azide Neutralization at Iowa Army Ammunition Plant" (W519TC-25-R-IA31) is dated September 2025. That is six months *before* the stated March

2026 discovery (HigherGov listing [M]).

The record shows the stockpile's condition was a known concern before March 2026. The March inspection documented that it had become acutely unstable.

Timeline. Entries come from the EPA Region 7 letter of 2026-11-20 [P] unless noted.

DATE	EVENT
2026-03-11	A routine inspection finds crystallization (Army advisory [P])
2026-03-12	EPA Region 7 is notified of "68 drums of potentially unstable lead (Pb) azide." The Army requests EPA technical help with air monitoring.
2026-03-16	EPA deploys an On-Scene Coordinator and contract teams and activates its regional Incident Management Team
2026-03-24	EPA takes 5 air samples and deploys 4 dust monitors. Results show no lead "above levels of concern."
2026-03-26 to May	A chemical-neutralization contract of about $120k with MuniRem is awarded, then cancelled in May. The Army cited "unacceptable risk." (Iowa Public Radio, 2026-11-21 [M])
2026-04-02	First EPA emergency **storage** permit
April 2026	EPA staff attend an Army decision-maker briefing (permit p. 2 [P])
2026-04-28	An explosive ordnance disposal inspection finds deterioration in 58 of 68 drums (Teller declaration via Military.com [M])
2026-06-30	Second emergency storage permit
2026-08-12 and 09-04	Army letters to EPA set out its analysis of alternatives, "culminat[ing] in the Secretary of the Army's selection of intentional detonation" (permit p. 2 [P])
2026-09-02 and 09-04	Army emergency permit request letter, then a partial application for storage *and treatment* (permit p. 2 [P])
2026-09-29	Third storage permit, valid through Dec 26, 2026 (EPA public notice [P])
2026-10-15	Army open house in Middletown with about 200 residents and community leaders

DATE	EVENT
2026-10-28	Final emergency permit application. EPA approved the sampling quality plan on 2026-11-05 (permit p. 3 [P]).
2026-11-13	**EPA signs the emergency storage-and-treatment permit**, effective 2026-11-13 through 2027-02-11 (permit pp. 1, 19 [P]). Its conditions include a surface wind limit of 15 mph.
2026-11-15	Army issues its 5-day notice, with detonation set for Nov 20 at noon
2026-11-16	EPA posts its public notice [P]. An independent EPA field team arrives on site.
2026-11-18	Army issues its 48-hour notice with plume maps
2026-11-19	Acting Army Secretary Telle postpones the detonation to Nov 23. The Iowa Environmental Council and the Sierra Club file a petition and an emergency stay motion in the 8th Circuit (No. 26-3374).
2026-11-20	**The 8th Circuit enters an administrative stay of the permit** (opinion pp. 3–4 [P]). Many outlets report Nov 19; the court's own opinion says Nov 20.
2026-11-21	The government gives notice that the Army intends to act by Nov 24 under RCRA's emergency munitions exclusion, even without the permit (as quoted in the opinion [P])
2026-11-23	**The 8th Circuit denies the stay and lifts the administrative stay** in a published per curiam opinion with no dissent [P]. A DOJ notice moves the date to Nov 25, citing favorable east-to-west/southwest winds and added barriers [P]. The same day, President Trump posts that the Army should wait for the court and Gov.-elect Sand (PBS NewsHour, 2026-11-23 [M]).
2026-11-25 ~1500Z	**Detonation**

Why detonate in place. According to EPA, the Army ruled out four alternatives (EPA Region 7 letter [P]):

- **Chemical treatment.** The Army, FBI and ATF judged that even removing the lids "could cause a spontaneous detonation."
- **Heavy earthmoving** to build an enclosure around the drums.
- **Transport** to the plant's existing permitted open-detonation unit.
- **Leaving the drums in place.** The risk rises as temperatures drop, and storage would be out of compliance with the plant's permit.

The court accepted the framing that the choice was "between a controlled detonation and an unplanned explosion, not between... a controlled detonation and no explosion at all" (opinion p. 10 [P]). Critics dispute how fully chemical neutralization was explored (see section 7, claim 5).

Site history.

- **Origins.** Built in 1940 as the Iowa Ordnance Plant. The Atomic Energy Commission used parts of it from 1947 to 1975.
- **Operation.** Government-owned and run by a contractor, American Ordnance LLC, a Day & Zimmermann subsidiary.
- **Superfund.** Listed on the National Priorities List on 1990-08-30. An Army site gives August 1989, likely the proposal date [U]. Known contaminants include explosives, metals, VOCs, and depleted uranium at the Firing Sites Area (EPA site profile [P]).
- **Existing permit.** The plant's 2018 hazardous-waste permit already allows open detonation, capped at 100 lb per hour. That cap is why a one-time detonation of about 9,500 lb needed its own emergency permit (permit pp. 1–2 [P]).
- **Enforcement.** In 2024 EPA fined the Army and its contractor $39,311 for hazardous-waste violations (EPA release [P]).

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4. Decision makers

These are public-record facts only. "Political" means appointed by the President or the administration. "Career" means a civil servant or a uniformed officer.

EPA

NAME	TITLE	TYPE AND APPOINTMENT	PRIOR ROLES (PUBLIC RECORD)	ROLE IN THIS DECISION
Jim (James) Macy	Regional Administrator, EPA Region 7 (Lenexa, Kansas)	Political; not Senate-confirmed. EPA announced on 2025-02-06 that President Trump had selected him (EPA).	Director, Nebraska Dept. of Environment and Energy, under Gov. Ricketts. About 30 years at Missouri DNR. President of ECOS 2019–20. (EPA bio)	**Signed the emergency permit** digitally on 2026-11-13 at 13:04:57 CST, under Delegation No. 8-6 dated 2026-06-09 (permit p. 19 [P]). Signed the 2026-11-20 letter to Gov. Reynolds [P]. Named respondent in No. 26-3374.
Lee Zeldin	EPA Administrator	Political; Senate-confirmed 2025-01-29 by a 56–42 vote (Trump, second term) (Roll Call)	Former U.S. Representative (NY-1)	Holds the hazardous-waste (RCRA) permitting authority he delegated to Region 7. Named respondent. Public spokesperson after the blast (EPA release [P]).

NAME	TITLE	TYPE AND APPOINTMENT	PRIOR ROLES (PUBLIC RECORD)	ROLE IN THIS DECISION
Patricia Murrow	Project Manager, Region 7 Land, Chemical & Redevelopment Division, Corrective Action Branch	Career (inferred from title) [U]	—	EPA's named contact for the permit (permit p. 18 [P])
Patrick Hurley	Community Involvement Coordinator, Region 7	Career (inferred) [U]	—	Contact for the public notice (EPA notice [P])

Army and Department of Defense (styled "Department of War" in current official documents)

NAME	TITLE	TYPE AND APPOINTMENT	NOTES	ROLE
Daniel P. Driscoll	Secretary of the Army until about 2026-09-02	Political; Senate-confirmed (Trump, second term). Confirmation date [U].	Left in early September 2026 (Stars and Stripes, 2026-09-03)	In office when the Army's 2026-08-12 letter recorded "the Secretary of the Army's selection" of detonation (permit p. 2 [P]). The available record does not show which Secretary made the selection.
Adam R. Telle	**Acting** Secretary of the Army since 2026-09-03	Political. Senate-confirmed in August 2025 as Assistant Secretary of the Army (Civil Works), not as Secretary (Congressional Record Index; Military Times, 2026-09-04)	Chief of staff to Sen. Bill Hagerty, 2021–25. White House legislative affairs in Trump's first term.	Postponed the detonation on Nov 19 and set the final date (EPA Region 7 letter [P]; DOJ notice [P])
W. Jordan Gillis	Assistant Secretary of the Army (Installations, Energy & Environment)	Political; confirmed and sworn in November 2025 (Army.mil, 2025-11-17). Previously held the role in an acting capacity.	—	Public statement on Nov 25 (TIME [M])

NAME	TITLE	TYPE AND APPOINTMENT	NOTES	ROLE
Maj. Gen. Eric P. Shirley	Commanding General, Army Sustainment Command (ASC), Rock Island Arsenal	Career officer; took command in July 2025	ASC absorbed the former Joint Munitions Command, the plant's parent command, in a June 2026 reorganization (Shirley declaration [P]; Army.mil, 2026-06-10)	Gave a sworn declaration on the date and mitigation [P]. Spokesperson after the blast.
Lt. Gen. Gavin A. Lawrence	**Acting** Commanding General, Army Materiel Command	Career; acting since 2026-08-07, after Lt. Gen. Chris Mohan retired (Army.mil)	—	ASC's parent command. No public role found.
Col. Aaron Teller	Commander, 71st Ordnance Group (explosive ordnance disposal)	Career	—	Sworn declaration on quantity and drum condition (via Military.com [M])
Lt. Col. Daniel V. Nosse	Commander, IAAAP	Career; in command since 2025-07-02 (Army.mil, 2025-07-08)	—	Community open house and letter
William J. Kehoe	IAAAP Deputy to the Commander	Civilian (career, inferred) [U]	—	The Army's named contact for the permit (permit p. 18 [P])

Department of Justice

NAME	TITLE	TYPE	ROLE
Adam R. F. Gustafson	Principal Deputy Assistant Attorney General, Environment and Natural Resources Division (renamed the Energy and Natural Resources Division in 2026)	Political; not Senate-confirmed in this role. Formerly EPA Deputy General Counsel (DOJ profile).	Signature block on the government's notices in No. 26-3374 [P]
David D. Mitchell	Attorney, Environmental Defense Section	Career (inferred) [U]	Signed the 2026-11-23 notice [P]

Court: 8th Circuit panel, No. 26-3374 (from the opinion [P])

JUDGE	APPOINTED BY	NOTES
Bobby E. Shepherd	George W. Bush (2006)	—
L. Steven Grasz	Donald Trump (2017)	—
Justin D. Smith	Donald Trump (confirmed 2026-06-15) (Federal Judicial Center)	Former personal attorney to President Trump (ABA Journal [M])

The ruling was unanimous and per curiam (unsigned). The court also noted that **the Army is not a party** to the case. It therefore "cannot and do[es] not opine" on the Army's claimed right to proceed without the permit (opinion n.1 [P]).

Other federal agencies

- **ATF:** Director Robert Cekada, a career ATF agent, Senate-confirmed 2026-04-29 (Roll Call). ATF took part in the assessment that ruled out chemical treatment (EPA Region 7 letter [P]).
- **FEMA:** supported the evacuation and lodging (Army advisory [P]).
- **HHS and CDC:** deployed staff (TIME [M]).
- **DTRA and NOAA:** modeled the plume (Shirley declaration [P]).
- **DoD Explosives Safety Board:** sat on the planning team (Army advisory [P]).

State and local

- **Iowa:**
- Gov. Kim Reynolds (R) leaves office 2027-01-12. Gov.-elect Rob Sand (D) has no authority over this decision.
- Iowa DNR Director Kayla Lyon was appointed by Reynolds and has served since 2019. Iowa DNR has **no permitting role** here; see section 5.
- Iowa HHS issued the health guidance (Iowa HHS fact sheet [P]).
- **Illinois:**
- Dr. Sameer Vohra, Director of the Illinois Department of Public Health (IDPH, 2026-11-18 [P]).
- James Jennings, Director of Illinois EPA, said EPA Region 7 had not notified his agency (Chicago Sun-Times, 2026-11-18 [M]).
- **Missouri:** Gov. Mike Kehoe (R) activated the state emergency operations center.

Recent turnover (documented)

- **Secretary of the Army:** the post has been held on an acting basis since 2026-09-03. There was no Senate-confirmed Secretary during the final decision period.
- **Army Materiel Command:** led by an acting commander since 2026-08-07.

- **Joint Munitions Command:** inactivated 2026-06-10; its role moved to ASC.
- **EPA:** the delegation of permitting authority to Region 7 was re-dated 2026-06-09. What changed is [U].
- **Iowa:** the governor and the DNR director's term turn over on 2027-01-12. That is likely *before* the permit's long-term cleanup obligations are complete.

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5. Decision path: who decides, who approves

1. **The Army chose detonation.** The permit records "the Secretary of the Army's selection of intentional detonation" (permit p. 2 [P]). EPA's letter calls the Army "the lead agency on this action" [P].
2. **EPA Region 7 permitted it directly.** Iowa is **not authorized** to run its own version of the federal hazardous-waste program (RCRA Subtitle C), so EPA issues these permits itself (Iowa DNR). The legal authority is RCRA sections 3004–3005 and **40 CFR 270.61**, the emergency permit rule (40 CFR 270.61). An emergency permit:
3. requires a finding of "imminent and substantial endangerment";
4. lasts at most 90 days;
5. requires a public notice;
6. can be terminated at any time.

EPA took no public comments. The petitioners argue a 45-day comment period was required. At the stay stage, the 8th Circuit held that a full comment period "is not a prerequisite" where it would be inconsistent with an emergency [P]. The merits are still pending.

1. **The Army also asserted a fallback.** The Military Munitions Rule exempts immediate responses to munitions threats from permitting (40 CFR 270.1(c)(3)(i)(D); 40 CFR 266.204). An "explosives or munitions emergency response specialist" must make that determination. DOJ said the Army would rely on this exemption if the stay remained (opinion [P]). The court did not rule on it, and the blast took place under the permit.
2. **EPA set the mitigation, as permit conditions** (permit pp. 3, 9–18 [P]; EPA Region 7 letter [P]). They include:
3. plume modeling with a deliberately conservative emission factor;
4. public notices at 5 days, 48 hours, 6 hours and hourly before the blast;
5. a surface wind limit of 15 mph;
6. a final plume estimate within 6 hours after the blast;
7. soil and wipe sampling in the modeled deposition area, starting within 24 hours;
8. cleanup **on and beyond the facility boundary**, with EPA approval;
9. a final report by the time the permit expires.

10. **Evacuation and shelter-in-place.** The Army's planning team recommended them and FEMA supported them. State health departments issued the health guidance, and the states declared emergencies.
11. **This was not a Superfund (CERCLA) action.** IAAAP is a Superfund site run under a 1990 Federal Facility Agreement; under Executive Order 12580, DoD leads cleanup and EPA oversees it. This detonation was handled under **RCRA, not CERCLA**. No source treats it as a CERCLA removal action.
12. **Did the process differ by administration?** The governing rules (40 CFR 270.61 and 40 CFR 266 Subpart M) have not been found to have changed. The changes documented in 2026 are organizational:
13. Joint Munitions Command was folded into ASC.
14. DOJ's environment division was renamed.
15. EPA's permit delegation to Region 7 was re-dated.

An EPA rule proposed on 2024-03-20 to tighten requirements for open burning and open detonation (89 FR 19952) has not been found finalized or withdrawn [U]. Its status matters for how the analysis of alternatives would be judged.

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6. Sources and who controls them

Ratings are quoted in each rater's own words. No numeric partisan scores are assigned. Ownership is as of November 2026 per the cited links; ownership changes in 2025–26 were not each re-verified.

SOURCE	OWNER OR CONTROL	FUNDING	DOCUMENTED RECORD AND RATINGS	USED FOR
EPA (Region 7 and headquarters)	Federal agency; Administrator Zeldin and Regional Administrator Macy, both political appointees	Appropriations	Issued the permit and is a named respondent defending it, so it is reporting on its own action. Its "zero" figures are real-time screening readings, not lab data.	Permit, letter, monitoring
U.S. Army / Army Sustainment Command	Federal; Acting Secretary Telle	Appropriations	Owns the waste and is the responsible party. Faces potential claims. Its emission predictions are "based on	Advisories, maps, declarations

SOURCE	OWNER OR CONTROL	FUNDING	DOCUMENTED RECORD AND RATINGS	USED FOR
			scientific judgment" (Shirley [P]).	
DOJ (environment division)	Federal; Principal Deputy AAG Gustafson	Appropriations	An advocate in litigation, not a neutral source	Court filings
8th Circuit	Federal judiciary	—	Published, unanimous opinion	Legal findings
State agencies (Iowa HHS, Missouri DNR, Illinois Department of Public Health)	State governments (Iowa R, Missouri R, Illinois D)	State budgets	Independent of the Army and EPA, so a useful cross-check	Health guidance, downstream monitoring
Earthjustice	Nonprofit law firm	Donors, foundations	Counsel for the petitioners, so an advocate	Petition, quantity figure
ABC News	The Walt Disney Co.	Ads, carriage	MBFC: "Left-Center," factual "High." AllSides: "Lean Left." Settled a Trump defamation suit for $15M in December 2024.	Timeline, quotes
CNN	Skydance, after its acquisition of Warner Bros. Discovery closed (Axios, 2026-10-06). CNN and CBS News now share an owner.	Ads, carriage, subscription	MBFC: "Left-Center." AllSides: "Left."	Live coverage; the "despite a court pause" headline
TIME	Marc and Lynne Benioff (since 2018)	Ads, subscriptions	MBFC: "Left-Center," "High." Ad Fontes: "Skews Left," "Reliable."	Context, Zeldin quote
PBS NewsHour	WETA / PBS (nonprofit)	Viewers, foundations, underwriting. Federal CPB	—	Live blog; the 20-mile FEMA alert

SOURCE	OWNER OR CONTROL	FUNDING	DOCUMENTED RECORD AND RATINGS	USED FOR
		funding ended in 2025.		
AP	Nonprofit cooperative owned by member news organizations	Licensing	MBFC: "Left-Center," "High." AllSides: "Lean Left." Ad Fontes: "Middle." Under White House access restrictions since February 2025.	Wire coverage
Iowa Public Radio	Nonprofit NPR member station (licensed through the Board of Regents universities)	Members, underwriting. Lost CPB funds in 2025.	AllSides: "Center" (low confidence)	MuniRem contract history; stay lifted
Iowa Capital Dispatch	States Newsroom, a 501(c)(3)	Donors, including the Rockefeller Family Fund and the Wyss Foundation	MBFC: "Left," "Mostly Factual." AllSides: "Center" (initial rating).	Coverage of the delay
KCRG (Gray Media) / **ABC17 KMIZ** (News-Press & Gazette) / **KWQC**	Local broadcast groups	Ads	Local affiliates; not covered by the major raters	Declarations, Missouri monitoring
Military.com	Current owner not re-verified [U]	Ads	—	Details of the Teller declaration
PolitiFact	Poynter Institute (nonprofit)	Grants, platform partnerships	Signatory to the International Fact-Checking Network (IFCN) code	Check of the data-center claim
The New Republic	Private (Win McCormack)	Subscriptions, donors	MBFC: "Left" [U]	Questions about the redactions
Raw Story	Private	Ads	MBFC: "Left" [U]	Cited only as a record that the

SOURCE	OWNER OR CONTROL	FUNDING	DOCUMENTED RECORD AND RATINGS	USED FOR
				dirty-bomb claim was circulating
Wikipedia	Wikimedia Foundation	Donors	A live article, edited during the event	Cross-check only

Not used as sources: several network-generated local news sites of unclear ownership, such as the Galesburg Reporter and the Peoria Standard.

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7. Claims vs evidence

#	CLAIM CIRCULATING	EXAMPLE	EVIDENCE	VERDICT
1	It is a "deep state" or Project 2025 operation	No published instance tied to this event was found	Project 2025's EPA chapter was checked through secondary transcriptions; the primary PDF now redirects to a store. The chapter does not mention open burning or open detonation, munitions disposal, emergency hazardous-waste permits or the military. The decision chain is documented: the Army selected the method, EPA issued the permit, and a court reviewed it.	**Unsupported**. The check of the Project 2025 text is incomplete [U].
1b	It is a ploy to clear land for data centers	X post, 2026-11-22: "They want the land"	PolitiFact, 2026-11-24: "Available information does not support a link."	**Unsupported**
2	The real material is nuclear, a "dirty bomb," and the redactions hide it	Raw Story, 2026-11-24 (a Massie poll); The New Republic, 2026-11-24	The permit identifies the waste as lead azide (CAS 13424-46-9, D003/D008) [P]. The redactions cover bunker identities, locations and the quantity breakdown; EPA says this is for infrastructure security. The site does have legacy depleted-uranium contamination in another area (the Firing Sites Area).	Nuclear material: **Unsupported**. Whether legacy contamination at the blast bunkers was disturbed: **Unknown**.

#	CLAIM CIRCULATING	EXAMPLE	EVIDENCE	VERDICT
3	Lead fallout will poison Missouri, St. Louis, Illinois or the Mississippi	Petitioners: a plume reaching "possibly as far away as 100 miles or more" (quoted in the opinion [P])	EPA: zero airborne lead on all real-time monitors one hour after the blast [P]. 33 Missouri screening sites had no detections [M]. St. Louis was never in the Army's modeled plume. The permit's modeling used a deliberately conservative emission factor [P].	Harm to the region or St. Louis: **Unsupported** by current data. Deposition near the plant: **Unknown** until lab results are in.
4	The Army ignored the court	CNN, 2026-11-21: "despite a court pause"	On Nov 21, while the stay was in place, the Army *stated* it could proceed under the munitions exclusion [P]. The blast took place on Nov 25, **after** the court lifted the stay on Nov 23 [P].	That a court order was violated: **Unsupported**. That the Army asserted it could proceed regardless: **Supported**, though the claim was never tested.
5	EPA rubber-stamped it and skipped public comment	Petitioners' motion, 2026-11-19	No comment period was held; EPA's notice said it was "neither requesting nor accepting comments" [P]. The 8th Circuit found that likely lawful for an emergency permit [P]. The MuniRem neutralization contract was cancelled in May; the New York Times reported the cancellation was unrelated to the proposal's merits (Iowa Public Radio [M]).	No comment period: **Supported**, and lawful at the stay stage. "Rubber-stamp": **Unsupported**. The record on alternatives is **contested**.
6	The stockpile was neglected	X posts citing 2004 concerns	Deterioration concerns date to 2004 (KCRG [M]). A neutralization solicitation was issued in September 2025. The storage solution could not be maintained once the lids became unsafe to open [P]. EPA issued a hazardous-waste fine in 2024 [P].	Long-term neglect or maintenance failure: **Supported**. That it was deliberate: **Unsupported**.

#	CLAIM CIRCULATING	EXAMPLE	EVIDENCE	VERDICT
7	Thanksgiving snow will wash lead into the water	AOL/Newsweek, 2026-11-25	Wet deposition is a real mechanism. But airborne readings were zero, and EPA has committed to sample public water systems and provide filters if lead exceeds the action level [P].	The mechanism: **Supported**. Meaningful contamination: **Unknown**, and unlikely on current data.
8	Monitors were placed to miss the plume	No direct instance found	Monitor locations, the total count and detection limits are not yet public. An online dashboard launched Nov 25. NASA aircraft and the TEMPO satellite were reportedly used (Fox9 [M]).	**Unsupported**. How the network was designed is not publicly known.
9	"Zero lead detected" is misleading	Devra Davis (Environmental Health Trust), via Newsweek	"Zero" means no detection on real-time screening monitors within hours. Detection limits are not published. Lab-analyzed filter, soil and wipe results are pending. EPA itself still advised wiping down outdoor surfaces that children touch.	**Partly supported**: accurate as stated, but incomplete
10	"It's East Palestine again"	Government Accountability Project	Both were deliberate releases chosen over uncertain alternatives, with thin local notice. The differences here: a different hazard, a court review, about 1,200 baseline samples, and an EPA team positioned in advance.	As a comparison of process: **reasonable**. That the harm is equivalent: **Unsupported so far**.

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8. Assessment

Bottom line. The acute hazard was an unstable stockpile that could explode on its own in freezing weather. It was removed on 2026-11-25 by a planned, court-reviewed and heavily mitigated detonation. Same-day evidence does not support the claims of regional poisoning, a cover-up, or a Project 2025 operation. For the St. Louis area there is no evidence of exposure: the city was never in the modeled plume, and Missouri screening found nothing.

Where the reassurance stops.

- The permit itself required the public notice to say "a short-duration airborne lead release will occur" (permit p. 25 [P]). The planners expected some lead to leave the site.
- Whether lead settled on soil, play equipment and farm surfaces near Middletown is **not yet known**. Real-time air monitors cannot answer that; lab results can, and they are due over the coming days and weeks.
- The documented record also shows:
- the material's deterioration was a known concern for years before March 2026;
- no public comment period was held;
- the record on alternatives is disputed, especially the cancelled chemical-neutralization contract;
- the agency reporting "zero" also approved the action and is defending it in court.

Confidence: moderate.

- Confidence is **high** that the risk to the region and the St. Louis area is negligible. Multiple monitors read zero, the area lies outside the modeled plume, and the modeling was deliberately conservative.
- Overall confidence is **moderate**, not high, for two reasons. Deposition data from near the site is not yet available. And every post-blast figure so far comes from the parties responsible for the action, without published detection limits or confirmation from state agencies.
- Confidence moves to **high** if lab-validated results from near the site come back close to baseline and Iowa or Illinois agencies or independent testing confirm them. One independent example is Purdue's free residential soil testing.

Action level: monitor, meaning real but contained: watch the signals. The level answers the question "Should you be alarmed?"

- **Why not "none":** a lead release did occur, by design (permit p. 25 [P]). Health guidance for the deposition zone remains in force: wet-clean surfaces, and keep children off them until results are in. Deposition results from near the site are pending. Calling this "no action needed" would get ahead of the evidence.
- **Why not "prepare":** no measured data shows a credible ongoing risk to the public. Airborne lead was zero on real-time monitors one hour after the blast (EPA [P]), and Missouri's 33 screening sites detected nothing. The Army says the explosive hazard has been removed; independent confirmation is pending.
- **Why not "act":** there is no official order beyond the existing advisories. Evacuees return when they get the all-clear call.
- **Split by audience.** For St. Louis and the wider region, the evidence supports "none." For Middletown and the modeled deposition area, "monitor" fits; follow the Iowa HHS guidance

on wet-cleaning. This report uses "monitor" because it covers the event as a whole.

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9. Signals to watch

These are observable triggers against which future updates can be judged.

Would raise the level (to "prepare" or "act"):

- Lab-validated soil results **above 200 ppm lead** (EPA's residential screening level) at properties outside the plant boundary. Or dust-wipe results above the permit's 100 µg/ft² sampling trigger *outside* the modeled deposition area. Sources: the EPA dashboard and response site; Army sampling reports.
- Any public water system reporting lead above the **15 ppb action level** after the blast, or EPA and the Army starting to distribute filters. Sources: EPA, Missouri DNR, Iowa DNR.
- An Army final plume map **larger than the pre-blast model**. The permit requires one within 6 hours of the blast.
- Army or explosive ordnance disposal confirmation that lead azide **survived**, or that a second detonation is scheduled.
- Evacuees still not cleared to return when FEMA-supported lodging ends on Nov 27 (Army advisory, 2026-11-24 [P]). Or a widened shelter-in-place order.
- A CDC or Iowa HHS call for blood-lead testing **based on measured exposure** rather than as a precaution.
- A state agency in Iowa, Illinois or Missouri publishing results that **contradict EPA's**.

Would lower the level (to "none"):

- Lab-validated air filter, soil and dust-wipe results **at or near the pre-blast baseline**, published with detection limits.
- Army confirmation that all the material was consumed, from a drone or explosive ordnance disposal survey.
- Evacuees cleared to return before FEMA-supported lodging ends on Nov 27, and the cleaning advisory for the deposition area lifted.
- EPA approval of the Army's **Final Impact Area Report** (due about 2026-12-25), with no off-site cleanup required.

Dates:

- 2026-11-26, about 1500Z: soil and wipe sampling must have started (permit [P]).
- The following days: preliminary EPA dust-wipe results (EPA Region 7 letter [P]).
- 2026-11-27: FEMA-supported lodging ends.

- About 2026-12-25: the Final Impact Area Report is due.
- 2027-01-12: Iowa's administration changes.
- 2027-02-11: the permit expires.
- Not yet scheduled: the 8th Circuit's ruling on the merits.

Reference thresholds (context, not specific to this event):

- National air quality standard for lead: 0.15 µg/m³ as a rolling 3-month average. That is the wrong yardstick for a spike lasting a few hours.
- CDC blood lead reference value for children: 3.5 µg/dL.
- The permit's sampling trigger: modeled deposition of at least 100 µg/ft².
- The current status of EPA's 2024 rules on lead in dust and soil was not verified [U].

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10. Open questions

1. **Deposition near the site.** What do lab-validated soil, dust-wipe and water samples from the modeled deposition zone (about 148 square miles) show against the 1,200-sample baseline?
2. **Completeness.** Was all of the lead azide consumed? Is a second detonation needed? Was any legacy contamination at the bunkers disturbed?
3. **Monitoring transparency.** How many monitors were there, where, with what instruments, and with what detection limits? The sampling quality plan and the permit appendices are redacted or unpublished.
4. The exact detonation time (in Zulu time), and the exact quantity: 9,500, 9,700 or 9,773.5 lb.
5. The text of the 20-mile FEMA shelter-in-place alert, and when evacuees will get the all-clear.
6. Which Secretary of the Army made the selection, Driscoll (before September 2) or Telle. Also, who signed the three earlier storage permits.
7. Why a September 2025 neutralization solicitation predates the stated March 2026 discovery, and why the MuniRem contract was cancelled.
8. How the 8th Circuit will rule on the merits of the notice-and-comment question.
9. The status of EPA's 2024 proposed rule on alternatives to open burning and open detonation.
10. Who funds long-term cleanup and claims after Iowa's administration changes on 2027-01-12. The permit places cleanup obligations on the Army.

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