REGION 7 ADMINISTRATOR
LENEXA, KS 66219

November 20, 2026

The Honorable Kim Reynolds
Governor of Iowa
Office of the Governor
Iowa State Capitol
1007 East Grand Avenue
Des Moines, IA 50319

Dear Governor Reynolds:

I am writing to you regarding the U.S. Army's planned detonation of 68 drums of degraded lead azide at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant (IAAAP), in Des Moines County, Iowa, which the Army has now scheduled for Monday, November 23, 2026 (previously scheduled for November 20, 2026). My highest priority is the health and safety of all Americans living within the potentially impacted area.

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and U.S. Department of War (DOW) are working together to ensure that the controlled detonation in Middletown, Iowa, is conducted in the safest manner possible. All agencies involved are prepared to take the most extreme mitigation measures available to ensure there is no risk to the public and any disruptions are minimized. I will stay in contact with you to keep you apprised of important updates as they are brought to my attention.

The Army, which is the lead agency on this action, provided EPA with extensive documentation and data showing that recrystallization of the lead azide in long-term storage had occurred. The Army determined that lead azide recrystallization created a risk of spontaneous explosion due to the material's sensitivity to friction and shock, creating a highly unstable and dangerous situation. The Army made this determination after considering and exhausting all other proposed alternatives. This included:

- **Treating the barrels with a chemical solution** -- It was determined by the Army, Federal Bureau of Investigation, and Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives that movement of the barrels, or even removing the lids given the advanced crystallization, could cause a spontaneous detonation. Their assessment was that this option posed a significant risk to personnel and the surrounding population.

- **Bringing in heavy earth moving equipment to build a structure around the lead azide containers** -- The Army determined that using heavy earth moving equipment could disturb the barrels and pose a significant risk to personnel and the public. The Army was able to build HESCO (additional barrier) walls around the lead azide-containing bunkers to channel blast effects, and they are using a misting system to wet the bunker, entrance, and surrounding soil to mitigate the amount of dust produced in any detonation.
- **Transporting the lead azide to IAAAP's existing RCRA-permitted Open Detonation Unit** -- The Army ruled this out after determining the risks associated with moving the lead azide drums -- potential sloshing and physical shock during transport, loading, and burial -- presented an unacceptable safety risk and a high probability of an uncontrolled detonation.
- **Leaving the lead azide drums in place** — The Army ruled this out because it created an unacceptable safety risk as it significantly increases the likelihood of an uncontrolled, accidental detonation, which poses a catastrophic threat to personnel life-safety, installation infrastructure, and the surrounding community. It would also be out of compliance with the facility's RCRA permit, potentially resulting in regulatory enforcement actions, significant fines, and legal liability. The Army also determined leaving the lead azide in place would lead to further installation access restrictions, indefinitely halting essential munitions production missions and degrading the military readiness of U.S. ground forces.

After ruling out all other possible measures that could be taken to adequately protect human health and the environment, the Army concluded the only viable option was a controlled detonation in place with extensive mitigation measures.

Between April and September 2026, EPA issued three emergency storage permits so the Army could continue storing the material safely while the Army evaluated treatment options. The Army has been consistently communicating and stressing to EPA its very significant concern about the risk of an uncontrolled explosion from the degraded lead azide presenting an imminent and substantial threat to human health and the environment.

Some of the Army's obligations as it pertains to EPA related requirements include:

- Notify the public in advance of the detonation and provide modeled projections of the plume based on weather conditions.
- Develop air dispersion and dust deposition modeling to support public notifications.
- Update and publicly distribute a final plume impact estimate using weather conditions documented at the time of the treatment activity within six hours after the detonation is complete.
- Conduct pre-event and post-event soil sampling for property owners who sign an access agreement.
- Conduct ambient air samples and dust deposition samples at the facility and in the nearby communities in the predicted air deposition area.
- Determine post-event remediation activities, including additional multi-media sampling with EPA approval based on the results of the detonation and observed dust deposition.

The Army will conduct air monitoring before and during the detonation to track properties outside of the base that are likely to be affected by the plume, and soil sampling before the detonation and within the blast area. Separately, an EPA Region 7 field team has been on site since November 16 to

conduct independent air monitoring, air sampling, and dust wipe sampling before, during and after the detonation. Using modeling and monitoring data, the Army will issue a final map showing where lead-containing dust has settled.

Current modeling predicts that airborne lead levels may rise for a few hours as the plume passes. The assessment is that this elevated, but low, level of lead will last for only a few hours.

EPA is also evaluating impacts from the plume to sources of drinking water and the surrounding watershed. EPA's on-site field team will monitor the direction and extent of the plume post-detonation to identify potentially impacted water systems and waterbodies. EPA and the Army will make immediate outreach to those public water supply systems to offer the following resources:

- Additional lead sampling in source water and finished water to monitor whether the water has been impacted by lead contamination from the detonation;
- Evaluation to ensure that levels of lead in finished drinking water are not impacted by the detonation; and
- Provision of point of use or point of entry filters for homeowners who are customers of any respective public water supply systems with lead levels above EPA's lead action level.

If elevated levels of lead are detected through sampling, EPA and the Army will continue providing sampling and sampling resources as well as point of use or point of entry filters, where appropriate.

EPA will work with the Department of War and the states to ensure that the risks of lead exposure through water are understood through real-world sampling and mitigated to the maximum extent practical.

EPA Region 7 has activated an Incident Management Team and our Regional Emergency Operations Center ahead of the detonation. EPA anticipates receiving preliminary dust wipe sampling results from EPA-collected samples in the days following the detonation. Full data quality review will take longer prior to data being ready for public release.

EPA strongly encourages members of sensitive groups, like children, pregnant women, or people who have occupational or other exposures, to take actions to reduce your potential risk to exposure to lead from this detonation. Areas of concern should be cleaned with a garden hose, wet rag, or baby wipe. This is incredibly important for areas likely to be contacted by children, including outdoor play equipment, toys, tables and chairs, handrails, patios, decks, exterior windowsills, and other high-contact surfaces. There is a claims process for the public to follow if they would like to be reimbursed by the Army.

Below is a timeline of events, including actions taken by EPA.

Timeline of Events

- **3/12/2026** -- EPA Region 7 was notified of 68 drums of potentially unstable lead (Pb) azide stored at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant in Middletown, Iowa. The drums are stored in two earth covered magazine (ECM) storage bunkers. U.S. Army Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD) with U.S. Army Development Command personnel and Army science group, have assessed the site and considered various alternatives. The Army reported the material to be crystalized and

potentially shock-sensitive. The Army requested technical assistance from EPA for air monitoring and off-site consequences.

- **3/16/2026** -- SEMD On-Scene Coordinator (OSC) and contract teams deployed to provide technical assistance and provide input to the Army's strategy to address the Pb Azide. The Regional Incident Management Team was activated to support this effort. During the initial response phase, EPA developed a QAPP and air monitoring/sampling plan which included provisions for setting up air monitoring instruments and collecting air samples for lead during and after a planned detonation event.
- **3/24/2026** -- EPA collected five air samples which were analyzed for lead. Additionally, four (DustTrak) dust monitoring instruments were deployed at the four collocated sampling locations. Sample results did not indicate lead above levels of concern.
- **4/2/2026** -- EPA issued the first of three emergency storage permits. The emergency storage permit (and subsequent extensions) allowed the Army to continue to store the degraded lead azide on IAAAP as it was a new hazardous waste on their facility.
- **5/07/2026** -- EPA R7 posted a Public Notice of Emergency Permit to continue storing lead azide containers at IAAAP. The notice was also sent to Iowa Congressional delegation, state lawmakers, and local officials.
- **5/13/2026 --** EPA R7 posted a Public Notice of Emergency Permit extension. The notice was also sent to the Iowa Congressional delegation, state lawmakers, and local officials.
- **6/30/2026** -- EPA issued the second of three emergency storage permits.
- **9/29/2026** -- EPA issued the third emergency storage permit.
- **10/15/2026** -- The Army held an Open House with nearly 200 residents and community leaders in Middletown, Iowa, to share lead azide detonation information. Information on the Open House can be found at the following links:
    - Commander Letter to Community: https://www.dvidshub.net/graphic/47093/iaaap-open-house
    - Environmental Handout: https://www.dvidshub.net/publication/issues/77825
    - FAQ Handout: https://www.dvidshub.net/publication/issues/77827
    - Open House Slides: https://www.dvidshub.net/publication/issues/77826
- **11/13/2026** -- EPA issued a temporary emergency treatment permit under the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA) for the planned detonation of 68 drums of degraded lead azide at IAAAP, which included measures to protect communities such as requiring surface-level wind speeds to not exceed 15 miles per hour.
- **11/13/2026 --** EPA Region 7 posted a Public Notice for the temporary emergency treatment permit. The notice was also sent to the Iowa Congressional delegation, state lawmakers, and local officials.
- **11/15/2026** -- Army issued its 5-day advance public notification in accordance with the Emergency Permit requirements.
- **11/16/2026** -- EPA Region 7 deployed a field team to perform independent sampling before the detonation, during the detonation, and after the detonation.
    - EPA's independent air monitoring, air sampling, and dust wipe sampling will inform and enforce aspects of the emergency treatment permit that will ensure the U.S. Army performs post-blast environmental sampling and cleanup where necessary.

- **11/18/2026** -- Army issues its 48-hour advance public notice in accordance with the Emergency Permit requirements, which included the predictive dust cloud modeling plumes. The maps will be updated at this website: https://www.army.mil/asc#org-iowa-army-ammunition-plant.
- **11/19/2026** -- Acting Secretary of the Army, Adam Telle, announces they are delaying the planned detonation until Monday, November 23, 2026.

My team is proudly committed to doing everything in our power to pursue clean, air, land, and water for all Americans. We stand ready to provide additional support, and we will continue to engage with state and local officials and the public to provide additional updates in a timely manner.

Sincerely,

JAMES MACY

Digitally signed by JAMES MACY
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Jim Macy
Administrator
EPA Region 7