Ban on Open Burn of Munitions Narrowly Passes Committee

By [HYPERLINK "http://wrkf.org/people/wallis-watkins"] · APR 28, 2016

The House Committee on Natural Resources and Environment was packed on Wednesday as Representative Gene Reynolds (D-Minden) presented[HYPERLINK "http://www.legis.la.gov/legis/BillInfo.aspx?s=16RS&b=HB11&sbi=y"], which Reynolds filed "strictly to stop the open burn of munitions in the state of Louisiana."

The bill is a result of what happened at Camp Minden, where sixteen million pounds of deteriorating explosives were stocked. "EPA and DEQ said they wanted to open burn all that. It was determined through scientific investigation that that was the worse thing you could do with all the pollutants that would be put in the atmosphere. And then the pollutants would travel for miles and miles," explained Reynolds.

In October of 2012, some of those munitions exploded.

Camp Minden is in Senator Ryan Gatti's (R-Bossier City) district. He supports the ban.

"How do you get rid of sixteen million pounds of explosives? The easiest thing was just burn it where it is, open burn. It would have been the largest burning of chemicals in the history of mankind. As people began to ponder that, they realized that this level of chemicals in the air would cause cancer in the area," he says.

Public Service Commissioner Foster Campbell says other states have already banned this practice. Therefore, "they ship it to us. Why should we allow it to burn in our state?"

LSU Shreveport Chemistry Professor, Dr. Brian Salvatore, called open burning of munitions a threat to public safety and health. The waste, he warns, is "not being destroyed. It's being transformed and it's being dispersed. What are you going to convert a lot of these things into? Other things that are very harmful."

CREDIT DR. BRIAN SALVATORE

There is a company in Central Louisiana prepared to burn similar munitions. Clean Harbor's Chief Compliance Officer, Phillip Retallick, opposed the bill, saying it "takes away our ability to operate our business, even though our business is in full compliance with all applicable state and federal rules."

The committee passed the bill on a close vote of nine yeas and eight nays. It's next stop is the House floor.