TAMMY BALDWIN
WISCONSIN

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

COMMITTEES:
APPROPRIATIONS
COMMERCE
HEALTH, EDUCATION, LABOR, AND PENSIONS

November 23, 2026

The Honorable Adam R. Telle
Acting Secretary of the Army
101 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-0101

Dear Acting Secretary Telle,

I write to you today to express our alarm and disapproval of the U.S. Army's haphazard and negligent handling of hazardous material at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant. Communities across the Midwest were shocked last week to learn the Army intended to detonate five tons of lead azide at the plant, sending toxic lead particles into a dust plume across several states. While the Army claims it has examined the presence of this substance since March, the Army did not announce the planned detonation until November 15, 2026, giving communities just five days' notice of the original detonation date. This short length of notice was wholly inadequate and unacceptable. The Army owes the public significantly better communication regarding any event that will cause public health risks.

I further find disturbing the Army's statements on the issue, indicating the Army "uncovered" this highly unstable material in a degrading state. By the time the Army discovered the material, it had degraded to such a point that spontaneous detonation was a possible risk. Moreover, the Army stated over the past few days that the planned detonation must occur imminently to avoid colder temperatures causing spontaneous detonation, an event likely to cause more significant public health and environmental hazards.

The Army has now twice delayed the planned detonation, further demonstrating a disorganized handling of the issue and creating additional confusion for the public. Given the initial notice that stated communities up to 100 miles away could be affected by the lead dust, and given changing weather and wind patterns, many residents across the Midwest, including Iowa, Wisconsin, and Illinois, are uncertain whether they will be affected by this health hazard when the detonation does occur. This is a major health and environment concern for my constituents.

What I find further troubling is the Army's plan to proceed with this detonation despite a stay granted by the Court of Appeals for the Eighth Circuit. I request the following actions and information from you:

1. Immediate cooperation with all court orders in effect, alongside compliance with all directives from the Environmental Protection Agency and other state and federal regulations.
2. A thorough accounting of how, why, and when the Army determined that a planned detonation was the best course of action, given the Army reportedly explored other removal options earlier this year.
3. An explanation of any timeline gap that exists between the date the planned detonation was decided and the date the Army announced the decision publicly (November 15, 2026).

4. An accounting of the public communications the Army made about the planned detonation and to whom.
5. Confirmation of how the Army analyzed weather forecasts, wind patterns, and other human and environmental factors to determine areas of possible exposure.
6. A thorough accounting of how those analyses were updated each time the Army delayed the detonation.
7. A detailed timeline of the presence of this substance at the Iowa Army Ammunition Plant, including the Army's work to inspect, monitor, and manage the substance over the time it was present, and any lapses in such work that contributed to the lead azide's degradation to such a point as to pose a significant public risk. This accounting should include an explanation as to why the Army seemed surprised by the sudden discovery of a degraded, volatile substance on its own property.
8. Steps being taken to investigate the plant's operator, American Ordnance LLC, and implement remediation of the contractor's management of hazardous substances at the facility.

It is unacceptable for the Department to allow one of its facilities to handle dangerous materials in such a negligent manner that the material degrades and poses a substantial health risk. It is further unacceptable for the Department to fail to provide timely and thorough communication to the public and to Congress about that risk and the planned remediation efforts. This disregard for public health and trust imperils the safety of our constituents and deserves immediate rectification and explanation.

Sincerely,



Tammy Baldwin
United States Senator