

# Senators Urge Pentagon To Cleanup UXO Near School

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Washington - U.S. Senators Mel Martinez (R-FL) and Bill Nelson today called for immediate action by the federal government to find and remove any remaining explosive devices or harmful chemicals from an area surrounding an Orlando middle school.

In a letter to the Pentagon, the two senators asked that the Army Corps of Engineers be dispatched at once to survey the site for live bombs or chemical toxins left over from what was a World War II bombing range and training base for, among others, B-17 Flying Fortress crews.

"This is about the safety of our children and our communities at large," Martinez said. "There are steps we need to take immediately to secure that safety, but we also need a long-term commitment from the government to reduce and eliminate the risk."

"The Corps must take prudent measures to remedy the situation immediately," Nelson said in the letter. "The cleanup has to happen; and, it has to happen now."

Their letter was prompted by yesterday's disclosure that a landowner recently discovered at least two live bombs as close as 1,500 feet from the Odyssey Middle School, which was built six years ago on the former bombing site called the Pinecastle Jeep Range.

Specifically, the senators asked that the Corps survey the school yard and nearby property to determine whether there are any additional subsurface threats buried bombs or toxic chemicals. They also want the Corps to put up any fencing that may be needed to separate the school from any areas where munitions might be found during the survey.

In their letter, the lawmakers also asked that as much as \$20 million eventually be allocated for the estimated cost of a complete cleanup. The federal government already has provided the Corps with more than \$1.1 million in priority funds for the cleanup.

The former Pinecastle Jeep Range is located approximately five miles northeast of the Orlando International Airport. In 1943, the federal government leased more than 12,000 acres there for, among other things, air-to-ground rocket firing and high-explosive bombing. After the end of WWII, the property reverted back to private owners. The owners have since used it for residences, schools, highways, landfills and pasture land.

Just last night, the Corps held a meeting to inform local officials and the public about its recently completed review and potential dangers on property in the area, including the landowner's discovery. It advised residents not to touch any strange objects and to report any sightings right away to the local sheriff.