

Madison Not so Free of Nuclear Weapons

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FYI: the City of Madison passed a nuclear-free zone ordinance in 1983, but it appears to give ANG an out (by not specifically addressing nuclear weapons at a military base): [23.34 - MADISON ESTABLISHED AS NUCLEAR FREE ZONE](#).

Maria Powell found newspaper articles about nuclear weapons and radioactive materials at Truax and wrote about it in [this post](#). Excerpt below:

“Nuclear explosives are nothing new” at Truax base

In 1974, not many years after his heyday as a student anti-war activist, [Soglin was strongly criticized](#) by his former supporters on the left for supporting the Air National Guard Unit at Truax.

Less than a year later, in early 1975, the fire department reported to city officials that it was being instructed on “special precautions” in case large Chinook (CH-47) helicopters flying in and out of Truax went down—because they were carrying “radioactive materials.” The [Army wouldn’t confirm](#) or deny this. [Mayor Soglin was alarmed](#), and in letters to senators and the secretary of defense, he wrote, “we have every reason to believe that the materials carried are considerably dangerous and most likely radioactive” and “are in all likelihood nuclear weapons.” He asked for a report on the contents of the helicopters and asked that shipments be stopped if they contained “dangerous material.”

The same day, [the Capital Times](#) reported that the Army confirmed that the helicopters were transporting missile components for an anti-ballistic missile defense site based in North Dakota, but still didn’t explicitly confirm that they were nuclear explosives.

The next day, however, Airport Superintendent Robert Skuldt told the [Capital Times](#) that “nuclear explosives are nothing new here. Nuclear weapons were stored at Truax Field during the early 1960s and their presence was common knowledge among city, county and state government officials.” Nuclear weapons were carried by F-89 fighters stationed at Truax and flying air defense missions ranging up into Canada, he reported. Further, Skuldt said he had attended “countless” briefings for local and state government officials focused on the nuclear weapons at Truax.^{[3]¹⁴}

Though the airport superintendent had clearly confirmed that Truax stored and transported nuclear materials for decades, the controversy about whether or not the Chinook helicopters contained nuclear materials, explosive or not, continued for months. In a March 6, 1975 [Wisconsin State Journal article](#), an Army spokesman admitted that certain components “carried on the flights were “of an explosive nature” but if an explosion happened “it would not be nuclear explosion.” He added that “it is national policy to neither confirm nor deny the presence, at any location of nuclear weapons. This would also include the movement of nuclear weapons.”

Mayor Soglin was outraged. “The completely uncommunicative method by which the Army reached its initial decision to utilize Madison for these transfers,” he was quoted, “followed by its unwillingness to discuss this situation with local city officials to date, is unsatisfactory.” He added, “these flights should not be made into Truax because of the hazards posed to persons living in the flight paths and in close proximity to the airport.”

On [March 7, 1975](#), U.S. Representative Lee Aspin (D-Racine) called the nation's anti-ballistic missile system "a wasteful and frankly most useless project" and said the use of Truax as a transfer point for shipments to anti-ballistic missile sites creates "a potentially serious safety hazard for the Madison community." [A few days later](#), Soglin's administrative aide James Rowen announced a plan to begin a class action lawsuit to halt the helicopter flights (the lawsuit would purportedly be privately funded and not involve the Mayor's office).^[5] The Environmental Decade also planned to file a court intervention to stop the flights.

The lawsuits would be based in part on the Army's violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA); the Army did not complete an environmental impact statement, which is required before a federally licensed activity that can affect the environment is initiated. Federal code also required that military agencies "consult with area residents and local officials before beginning such an operation"—which they clearly had not done.

The lawsuit threats were effective. In May 1975 the Army said the helicopter flights would end and [the lawsuits were dropped](#).

Mayor Soglin, 1995: F-16s "belong in a combat zone"Mayor Soglin, 2017: F-35s are "wonderful news, a holiday gift for families"

However, Truax fighter jet crashes, which had occurred [regularly since the 1950s](#) continued. In 1995, after yet another fighter jet crash, the [Wisconsin State Journal](#) wrote: "The F-16C's safety record has been criticized by Mayor Paul Soglin, who argues that flights represent an unacceptable risk to neighborhoods and businesses near the base. The F-16s belong in a 'combat zone, but not here in the city,' Soglin said."^[6]

But in subsequent years, Soglin's attitude shifted toward overt praise and support for the Air National Guard base at Truax. After another fighter jet crash outside of Madison in 2011, in which a pilot was injured, [Soglin praised the Air National Guard](#) for its safety precautions. "I know that the Air National Guard is concerned for the safety of civilians" and "is taking appropriate steps to ensure everyone's safety," he was quoted.

Fast forward to the current F-35 proposal. In December 2017, just before announcing he would run for governor, Soglin gushed with enthusiasm for the F-35s at Truax—telling the [Cap Times](#) the decision to locate F-35s at Truax was "wonderful news...truly an early holiday gift for many families, and for the entire area."