

E NVIRONMENT

Earle study to determine safety of disposal sites

Results so far show no immediate threat to human health

By Gabri Il Illiano

COLTS NECK — Naval Weapons Station Earle has been involved in a study of its waste disposal sites since 1980, and to date, has discovered nothing to indicate that any of the 29 sites needs to be cleaned up.

The Installation Restoration Program was created by the Department of Defense after Congress directed the Environmental Protection Agency to develop a national program that would manage old disposal sites.

According to Pat Muldrow, public affairs officer at Earle, the study and any remedial action required will be funded by the Navy, as the military is not included in the federal Superfund funding; however, the testing is conducted under the provisions of the Superfund Amendment and Reauthorization Act, which authorizes the inclusion of federal facilities in environmental cleanups. Muldrow said that the Navy is committed to do whatever it takes to clean up the sites, if it becomes necessary.

According to Joe Freudenberg, case manager for the Department of Environment

Protection and Energy, thus far, his agency has not seen anything that would present an immediate threat to human health.

The DEPE will be examining the results of remedial investigations conducted by the Navy on some of the Earle sites as early as next month. Freudenberg said that the results will be quantified in specific numbers. For example, they will be able to see exactly how much of each toxin is present in a site's soil, ground water and sediment.

The restoration program has been developed as a four-phase program, according to the station's contracted engineers, Weston Corporation. Phase I identifies contamination sites through record searches, personnel interviews and site visits. Phase II is a confirmation study supplementing information obtained during the preliminary assessment. In Phase III, extensive investigations are performed on the site to determine the extent of the contamination, and in Phase IV, remedial actions are evaluated and put into action.

Muldrow said 11 of the 29 sites are now in Phase III, and when all of the tests are completed, she expects that a determination will be made sometime this year as to whether or not any of the sites will progress to Phase IV. The remaining 18 sites are still in Phase II of the study.

Several rounds of testing must be conducted on each site over a period of time to

Each test is also verified by independent labs as well as the EPA and the DEPE. It is a very complicated process and that is why it takes so long, said Muldrow.

Freudenberg said that a feasibility study will be conducted by the DEPE on some of the sites that are in the more advanced stages of testing. If levels found are not higher than specified DEPE standards, it is possible that the Navy will not have to address those sites again.

Whether action is needed or not, Freudenberg said that their evaluation of the testing must be summarized in a record of decision, and a public hearing will be held to inform the public of the agency's findings. He added that some sites may require further monitoring if immediate action is not deemed necessary.

Because of concern over ground water, contamination wells have been installed at all 29 sites and are monitored at regular intervals. According to studies conducted thus far, ground-water quality in the aquifers most susceptible to contamination have been determined to be within acceptable standards.

The sources of contamination at Earle

have been from waste solvents, blasting grit, paints and metals, and explosives from un-serviceable munitions. Also contributing to the waste is trash such as packaging materials, lumber and rags.

While the current waste-disposal methods are now in compliance with EPA laws, Earle's past disposal methods consisted mainly of burial of waste in landfills.

Colts Neck Health Official Bill McBride is on the technical committee of the restoration program, and said that his job is to make sure that everything that is done is done properly and with the community of Colts Neck in mind. McBride said, "In my opinion, so far everything has been done in the best interests of Colts Neck."

Naval Weapons Station Earle was first commissioned in 1943 and was most active during World War II, when a large number of ammunition and explosives used in Europe were shipped from Earle. This station alone loaded more than 731,000 tons of ammunition onto vessels during the war.

The station's principal mission is still the storage, maintenance, renovation and control of munitions. Currently, its operations are limited to the repainting and repairing of munitions.

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