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NEWSPAPER ARTICLE "MARINE CORPS RECRUIT DEPOT MAY BE PUT ON SUPERFUND
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Marine Corps Recruit Depot May Be Put On Superfund List

Tests Find Contaminants In Water, Soil On Site

By BRAD SWOPE
Staff Writer

Federal officials on Friday proposed adding the Parris Island Marine Corps Recruit Depot to the Superfund list of the nation's most hazardous sites after tests showed depot waste dumps were contaminating nearby shellfish.

PCBs, suspected cancer-causing chemicals, have been found in oysters inhabiting tidal waters near the depot, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency said in a report. Tests dating to 1986 found mercury, lead and other contaminants in surface water and soil on the 8,000-acre site.

"With any site that is proposed, there's a potential for environmental damage and/or human health problems," said Hagan Thompson, a spokesman for the EPA's regional office in Atlanta.

The agency's one-page summary of what's known about the depot paints an unsettling picture of toxic contaminants threatening a sensitive coastal ecosystem.

Runoff from the depot enters salt marshes and streams surrounding Parris Island, the report said. Several bodies of water 15 miles or less downstream, including the Broad River, are used for fishing. Loggerhead sea turtles, a threatened species, nest within the same range.

But contaminants are apparently not threatening drinking-water supplies, Thompson said.

"Damage to wildlife and the food chain is probably the bigger danger," he said.

All Beaufort County residents within four miles of the contaminated areas normally obtain drinking water from the Beaufort-Jasper Water and Sewer Authority's water-

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treatment plant. That plant draws its water from the Savannah River, which is not affected by runoff from the depot, the EPA report said.

The depot was among six sites in the Southeast and two in South Carolina proposed Friday for the EPA's national priorities list under the Superfund program. The other South Carolina site is Aqua-Tech Environmental Inc. in Spartanburg County.

Maj. Carol McBride of the U.S. Marine Corps said Friday afternoon that the Marines hadn't been officially notified of the depot's proposed listing.

"We don't have a lot of information available," McBride said.

"We've known about the possibility that there were some potential (waste) sites."

Thompson said the depot will have to be studied carefully to pinpoint contaminated sites and cleaned up at public expense. He said there's no way to tell now what the cleanup would cost.

The depot, spread between Parris Island and several smaller islands about four miles south of Beaufort, is mostly used for training Marine Corps recruits.

Its 8,000 acres include more than 4,000 acres of salt marsh and tidal streams.

Asked how the depot became contaminated, Thompson said, "I think it's like most of these cases, it got there through years of not being careful about how wastes were disposed of."

Thompson said most Superfund sites predate state and federal laws

requiring proper disposal of hazardous wastes.

"Prior to 1976, waste pretty much went anywhere on the 'back 40,' Farmer Jones' pasture or wherever they could find a place to put it."

The EPA report on the depot said numerous potentially hazardous waste sites have been identified at the installation.

Wastes disposed of in three unlined landfills at the depot have included empty pesticide containers, oils contaminated with PCBs (polychlorinated biphenyls) and mercury compounds.

Mercury is a poisonous metal that can cause nerve damage or death in high doses.

In addition, rinse-water from pesticide application containers and equipment was dumped from 1950 until 1978 on dirt or grassy areas between two Quonset huts.

The EPA first tested the depot in

1991, when it found "numerous" organic compounds, including PCBs, in oysters from tidal waters near one of the landfills. The levels of PCBs were not indicated.

Sites proposed for national priority listing usually end up on the final list, Thompson said, and government property is not immune.

"They're put on the list to heighten awareness that even the feds (federal government) have waste sites that need to be taken care of," he said.

The other four proposed sites are Escambia Wood Treating in Pensacola, Fla.; Texas Eastern Kosciusko Compressor Station in Attala County, Miss.; Cherry Point Marine Corps Station in Havelock, N.C.; and Arnold Engineering Development Center in Coffee and Franklin counties, Tenn.

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