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## Parris Island faces old pollution problems

FRANK SHELTON  
Special to The Gazette

Decades-old incinerator waste, broken glass and rusted scrap metal cover a wetland not far from where U.S. Marine Corps recruits train. Nearby, construction debris and hazardous liquids lay buried next to a tidal inlet and damaged underground storage tanks have leaked crude oil into the soil.

Those are just a few of the polluted sites that

the federal government is now trying to assess and clean after years of environmental neglect on Parris Island.

"The island is a product of its times," said Russell Berry, the director of the state Department of Health and Environmental Control's Lowcountry office. "Most of the problems there were caused during a time when people didn't realize the environmental consequences of their actions."

Tim Harrington, an environmental scientist with Parris Island's Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs office, said addressing the problems will require years of work and millions of dollars in funding.

"But that is what we're committed to doing," he said. "Our charge is to study the problem areas and then determine the best ways to correct them. It's not an easy job but it has to be done."

### Cleanup begins

The environmental problems on Parris Island were documented in the mid-1980s when Congress passed the Resource, Conservation and Recovery Act, requiring the military branches to examine their installations.

A survey of the island uncovered 45 polluted sites, 19 of which the health department and

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## Pollution

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and the federal Environmental Protection Agency said needed some cleaning.

The first phase of the cleanup is set to begin this summer. Harrington said he and other scientists will do "remedial investigations" on the four most polluted sites.

"We still need to determine what exactly is there and how widespread (the pollution is)," Harrington said. "What we find this summer will determine what method we use to take care of it."

The first site is an incinerator landfill located near the salt marsh surrounding Ribbon Creek. Between 1921 and 1965, the Marine Corps burned its solid waste and then dumped the rubble and ashes into this wetland. It also dumped liquids and solid wastes there.

"It was a different mentality back then," Harrington said. "The thinking was that you wanted to preserve as much of the dry land as you could and by dumping your waste in wetlands, you actually created more dry land."

Mounds of waste still litter this wetland today. Fiddler crabs are forced to maneuver an obstacle course of broken bottles and charred debris on their way through the mud and sand.

Four wells have already been set up in this area to monitor the spread of pollutants. Harrington said lead and chloroforms have been detected.

This summer scientists will look at the health of several local plants and animals. If they are struggling to survive, it could mean that there is a threat to other organisms as well.

"This is one of the most troubling areas because of its proximity to the salt marsh and tidal waters," Harrington said.

Site two is a borrow pit landfill located near Archer's Creek and the Parris Island entrance. The pit was dug in the 1960s and the dirt was used to build a causeway.

After the hole was dug, the Marine Corps filled it with a mixture of common waste, construction debris and paints.

"Basically any kind of waste they had on the depot went in there," Harrington said.

He said one way to prevent pollution at this site from spreading would involve sealing the area around the landfill and digging wells to monitor leaks.

The third site is the causeway that was built with dirt from the borrow pit. Between 1960 and 1972, the Marine Corps also used solid waste to build the road, some of which was dropped directly into a salt marsh.

"We also believe materials that today would be considered hazardous waste were dumped there," Harrington said. "The troubling part is that we don't know exactly where along the causeway all the waste is located."

The final site that scientists will focus on this summer is the only one that became polluted since the mid-1980s survey. In 1994, a chemical spill from a storage tank occurred at the island's dry-cleaning facility.

Harrington said the site could be decontaminated by pumping air into the ground, which would vaporize the chemicals and allow them to be collected and removed.