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Costly clean-up

Navy base dumps are absorbing millions and years

BY CHELLE DELANEY

The Department of Defense has earmarked more than \$22 million to clean up hazardous waste sites at Jacksonville's three Navy bases, but work will continue well into the 21st century.

Environmental authorities have identified 119 sites requiring clean-up at Jacksonville Naval Air Station, Mayport Naval Station and Cecil Field.

Another 20 potential targets are under study at the first two bases. And at Cecil Field, contamination is one of the complications in trying to refit the base for non-military use once the Pentagon mothballs it as mandated by the 1993 Federal Base Closure and Realignment Commission (see related story, this page).

So far 18 hazardous waste sites have been identified at Cecil Field — a 20,172-acre fighter jet installation on Jacksonville's far Westside — and another 10 to 15 are under study, base spokesman Bert Byers said.

"Many of the sites probably won't be cleaned up by the time the base closes in 1999," Byers said. "They're going to fence off areas not cleaned up and allow reuse to

take place where there aren't any areas that have to be cleaned up."

Herbert McCarthy, executive director of a mayoral commission charged with finding a new future for Cecil Field, said the contamination "isn't going to impede us. The Navy has committed to clean up the areas no matter how long it takes. They've already started."

The federal Environmental Protection

Agency lists both Cecil Field and Naval Air Station Jacksonville (NAS-Jax) on its Superfund roster of the nation's worst-contaminated sites. The Pentagon has spent \$14.4 million from a Defense Environmental Restoration Account to investigate, analyze and clean up hazardous waste at NAS-Jax and Mayport. Estimated clean-up costs to date at Cecil run as much as \$8.4 million but could go much higher for problems yet to be addressed.

Here is an overview of the situation by base.

At Cecil Field, current clean-up efforts are focused on two of the 18 targeted sites. Costs for the two could exceed \$4 million by Navy estimates.

The first is an Aircraft Intermediate Maintenance Department site used from

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1959 to 1980. Paint wastes, metals and other contaminants remain. A 4,100-gallon underground concrete storage tank, a seepage pit, other containers and soil are set for removal by June 4, a federal target date.

The Navy's consultant on the project, ABB Environmental Services Inc. of Tallahassee, reported to the Navy that there is an "actual or threatened release of hazardous substances from the site (which) may present an imminent and substantial endangerment to the public health ..."

Clean-up cost estimates range from \$722,000 to \$3 million depending on the methods, Byers said.

The second active Cecil Field clean-up site is at the base golf course. The military dumped empty and filled pesticide containers in a wooded area from the early 1970s to 1978. Byers said cost estimates range from \$705,000 to \$1.77 million depending on methods, but current work isn't expected to be the last, and the Navy plans additional studies.

At Jacksonville Naval Air Station, the DOD has spent more than \$10 million in DERA money, base spokeswoman Miriam Lareau said. EPA pinpointed 45 separate pollution sources at the Superfund-listed base and Lareau said four more were identified for study last year.

Three of the 45 sites have priority status. They are:

- Area one, site of a fuel leak, waste sludge drying beds and a pond where 2.3 million gallons of treated sewage were dumped daily until 1988 from the base's wastewater treatment plant.
- Area two, which encompasses a construction debris site and a former PCB storage area. This dump also includes a 38-acre disposal site for hazardous wastes, including low-level radioactive paint and spent

solvents, and an area where from 1942 to 1952 the military burned five to 10 gallons of waste oil daily to train firefighters.

- Area three includes a pit with paint waste, storm and sanitary sewers where chemical spills have been recorded, a seepage pit and an area near the Naval Exchange dry cleaners where cleaning solvents have been found in the groundwater.

At Mayport Naval Base 56 sites have been identified, said Cheryl Mitchell, environmental engineer with the base's civil engineering department. Of those, 15 sites require no further action, 19 need additional testing and 22 sites still must be investigated.

To date, the Pentagon has spent \$2.2 million in DERA funds for waste site analysis and clean-up. Another \$2.2 million was allocated for the fiscal year that began last Sept. 30.

Mayport is not a Superfund site. Mitchell said the 56 sites were identified in 1989 and no more have been added since. The base's major sources of contamination were petroleum products and pesticides. At smaller sites among the 56, pesticides have been found in the soil and groundwater.

Among individual projects, two sites will be cleaned by Sept. 30, and a third will be under study to determine the best approach.

The Navy will spend about \$250,000 to remove PCBs from an electrical transformer storage site. Another \$50,000 is earmarked to clean a metal-blasting site. And at least \$100,000 is budgeted for studies on several sludge lagoons used to dispose petroleum products, with more investigation planned.

Last year the Navy selected Mayport and a base in California to participate in its Navy Environmental Leadership Program, which allows contractors to demonstrate new or developing technologies to prevent pollution or clean it up.

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