



**ATLANTIC FLEET WEAPONS TRAINING FACILITY**  
VIEQUES ISLAND, PUERTO RICO

***RCRA FACILITY UPDATE***

JULY 1998

EPA and EQB are initiating expanded public outreach activities for the RCRA permitting process at the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Facility on Vieques Island. The EPA and EQB value the perspectives that residents have on these issues and encourage community involvement in the Agency's decisions. The main goal of this outreach program is to establish an open dialogue between EPA, EQB and the community. Objectives of the program include providing the community with information to understand the permitting process and the technical details about the facilities RCRA activities to facilitate participation in decision-making and developing effective mechanisms for the community to voice concerns, ask questions and provide input.

***Community Outreach Plan***

The public outreach activities will begin with the development of a community outreach plan for the facility. The purpose of the plan is to develop an approach to share information with interested community members and allow for meaningful input in EPA's decision-making process. EQB will develop the plan for EPA. EQB identified some members of the community and organized groups that have an interest in RCRA activities at the facility. These parties assisted EQB in preparing a list of interview candidates. EQB will conduct face-to-face interviews during July 1998 to understand the issues of concern to the community. EQB will also solicit ideas on how to involve the public regarding the RCRA activities at the facility. A draft of the community outreach plan will be made available to participants for comment, before it is finalized. EQB and EPA will jointly implement the plan. EPA and EQB anticipate holding public availability session and meetings in the future to further the goals of this public outreach effort. Facility updates, such as this may be used to keep community members apprised of developments.

***Background***

**Resource Conservation and Recovery Act (RCRA)**

The Resource Conservation and Recovery Act or RCRA is the environmental law that addresses how to safely manage and dispose of the huge volumes of municipal and industrial solid waste generated in the United States. The program outlined under Subtitle C of the Act, is the one most people think about when RCRA is mentioned. Subtitle C establishes a program to manage hazardous wastes. It deals with the transportation, treatment, storage and disposal of hazardous waste. It identifies three types of hazardous waste handlers: generators; transporters; and owners or operators of treatment, storage and disposal facilities or TSDs.

**Munitions Rule**

Under certain conditions, the open burning and open detonation (OB/OD) of munitions is considered treatment of a hazardous waste under RCRA. As a result, some OB/OD activities are subject to RCRA regulations and require a permit. The Munitions Rule, which is the RCRA regulation that addresses OB/OD activities was recently issued by EPA and became effective in August 1997. It is important to note that when a munition is used for its intended purpose, which includes when the munition is used for the training of military personnel, it is not regulated under RCRA. EPA views such training to constitute the normal use of a product, rather than waste disposal. Also, the military

often conducts range clearance exercises as a result of weapons testing or training at firing ranges. During these exercises range clearance activities, military Explosive Ordnance Disposal specialists clear ranges of debris and unexploded ordnance, which are generally destroyed on-site, but may also be shipped off-range for treatment and disposal. EPA considers range management to be a necessary part of the safe use of munitions for their intended purpose: thus the range clearance is an intrinsic part of training or testing. The Munitions Rule excludes range clearance exercises from RCRA subtitle C regulations.

Under RCRA, facilities that require a permit are also subject to corrective action. Corrective action is the process by which releases to the environment (for example, leaks, spills etc.) are identified, investigated and cleaned up.

#### **Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility**

Vieques Island is located approximately seven miles southeast of U.S. Naval Station Roosevelt Roads in the Caribbean Sea. The Navy owns approximately 22,600 of the island's 33,000 acres. The RCRA facility, which is part of the Roosevelt Roads Naval Station Command, encompasses two contiguous Naval areas, the Eastern Maneuver Area (EMA) and the adjoining Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Facility (AFWTF), which together occupy 14,600 acres within the east central and eastern portions of Vieques Island.

The AFWTF, located on the far eastern tip of the island, provides facilities and schedules naval gunfire support and air-to-ground ordnance delivery training for Atlantic Fleet ships, NATO ships, air wings, and smaller air units from other allied nations and the Puerto Rican National Guard. The Eastern Maneuver Area is located adjacent to and west of the AFWTF. The Fleet Marine Force, Atlantic, conducts training for Marine amphibious units, battalion landing teams and combat engineering units in the Eastern Maneuver Area. On occasion, naval units of allied nations having a presence in the Caribbean and the Puerto Rican National Guard also utilize the Eastern Maneuver Area.

The Naval Ammunition Support Detachment (NASD) located at the western portion of Vieques Island is classified as a separate facility under RCRA regulations. NASD is a storage area for serviceable munitions. The storage of these munitions is not regulated under RCRA. However, periodically some of the munitions are removed from NASD to the OB/OD facilities at the AFWTF. Under the Munitions Rule, these munitions become a RCRA regulated waste upon removal from NASD for treatment (OB/OD) at the AFWTF. Treatment of these waste from NASD through open burning/open detonation at the AFWTF requires a RCRA permit. Because a permit is required for this activity, other portions of the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training facility (including the Eastern Maneuver Area) become subject to corrective action requirements under RCRA.