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THE MEMPHIS DEPOT
TENNESSEE

ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD
COVER SHEET

AR File Number 352

File: 190.200
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U.S. Army Corps of Engineers ®
Huntsville Center

ENVIRONMENTAL FACT SHEET
Defense Depot Memphis, Tennessee

Working Toward a Safer Tomorrow
Cleanup of Recovered Chemical Warfare Materiel

The Site

The Defense Depot Memphis, Tennessee (DDMT), covers 642 acres of land in Memphis, Shelby County, Tenn. Throughout its fifty-five years of operation, the site was used as a warehousing and supply distribution point for military services and some civilian agencies.

It began operations in 1942 during which time the Chemical Warfare Section was activated at the defense depot. At that time it functioned as a storage and distribution site specifically for the Army's engineer, chemical, and quartermaster corps.

Chemical Warfare Materiel

In 1946, a single incident occurred involving bombs filled with the toxic blistering agent, Mustard. The World War II German chemical bombs were being shipped by railroad between the shipping port at Mobile, Ala., and storage facilities at Pine Bluff Arsenal, Ark. Some munitions were found to be leaking the Mustard chemical agent while the railcars were traveling through Memphis on the Missouri Pacific Railroad. Three railcars carrying the munitions were moved to the depot where the munitions could be handled properly.

Twenty-nine bombs were decontaminated at Dunn Field by being drained into a pit containing bleach and then burned. The bomb casings were then burned in a separate pit.

In addition, the depot operated as a supply point for the Chemical Corps. It likely stored chemical agent identifications sets. Chemical agent identification sets are kits of glass vials that contain dilute solutions of chemical warfare agents. The glass vials were used to train soldiers to identify the odors of chemical agents.

Environmental Restoration

The Corps of Engineers has begun a study, an "engineering evaluation/cost analysis," to confirm the exact location and extent of the buried chemical warfare materiel. An engineering evaluation/cost analysis provides a detailed look at the situation and recommends alternate courses of action. The study requires field work, well installation, soil sampling and the use of sophisticated detection devices (similar to metal detectors).

The study is being conducted by Parsons Engineering Science, Inc. Before Parsons could begin its work, the company had to prepare comprehensive work and site safety and health plans that required

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Well installation at DDMT

approval through the Corps of Engineers, the Department of Defense, and the national Department of Health and Human Services. Parsons installed six monitoring wells down gradient of the disposal pits in August 1998.

A draft engineering evaluation/cost analysis will be completed in January 1999 at which time it will be presented to the state environmental regulators and the public for comment. No decisions are made about a response to these buried items until these comments are received.

Chemical warfare materiel has been successfully and safely recovered from various sites across the country: a suburb of Washington, D.C., in 1993; the Mississippi State Fairgrounds in Jackson, Miss., in 1995; the former Raritan Arsenal in Edison, N.J, in 1996; and the former Fort Ord, Calif., in 1997.

Summary

The Defense Logistics Agency and the Corps of Engineers take seriously their obligation to cleanup the recovered chemical warfare materiel left behind at DDMT from past practices.

The circumstances surrounding the chemical warfare materiel at the defense depot are well-documented and therefore the Corps is confident that the burials are not extensive. They are limited and isolated to Dunn Field.

Also, while the contents of these buried items can be toxic and dangerous, the procedures and precautions used by the Corps of Engineers assure public safety while the investigation and any subsequent actions take place.

For More Information:

Public Affairs Office
(205) [illegible]
http://www.mobile.army.mil

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