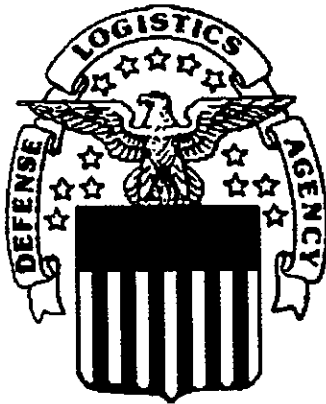




THE MEMPHIS DEPOT TENNESSEE

ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD COVER SHEET

AR File Number 416

Depot tent to contain toxic cleanup

By Tom Charlier
The Commercial Appeal

They're pitching a tent at the old Defense Depot Memphis, but it'll take more than hammering stakes in the ground and assembling poles.

A state-of-the-art vapor-containment structure, being erected with the help of a crane this week, is the first visible sign of a major cleanup project set to begin next month.

As part of a \$2.7 million contract, crews will dig up what's left of chemical-warfare mate-

riel buried at the depot decades ago.

The excavation will be conducted within the 70-foot-diameter tent, which utilizes vacuum-like negative air pressure to seal in any vapors that might emanate from the waste pits. It also features elaborate air-filtration systems, video cameras and monitoring equipment.

With the structure and the planned safety precautions, the excavation should pose no threat to workers or the public, said Jackie Noble, command affairs officer for the Defense Distribution Center in the De-

fense Logistics Agency. "There's many fine teams, of trained technical personnel that have done this before," Noble said. "This is not an experiment."

UXB International, a Virginia firm, has been hired to remove the chemical-warfare wastes. Depending on the nature of the substances, they will either be taken to a treatment or disposal facility.

The materiel includes the remains of World War II German mustard-gas bombs and chemical agent identification kits.

The bombs wound up in Memphis because they were found

leaking while being transported by train to Pine Bluff, Ark., in 1946. The chemicals were drained into a pit, neutralized, burned and the casings were buried.

The identification kits consist of glass vials used to train soldiers to recognize the odors given off by chemical agents.

The substances are being dug up to eliminate any potential problems or threats to future owners or tenants of the now-closed depot.

Shawn Phillips, environmental coordinator at the depot,

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said there are three main disposal sites to be excavated in Dunn Field, located on the far northwest side of the 642-acre depot.

One site contains the 29 bomb casings, while another holds the neutralized mustard and the third has the identification

kits. Phillips said officials don't believe any of the wastes they'll find will be dangerous.

"We won't be surprised to find some residual mustard that's hardened on the insides of the steel (bomb) casings," he said.

The tent will be moved several times during the cleanup so that it's always covering the excavation.

Site preparation and person-

nel training should be complete by the end of March, allowing removal to begin in April. The work should be finished in July.

An information post will be set up to answer questions about the project from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at Corry Middle School, 2230 Corry.

To reach reporter Tom Charlier, call 529-2572 or E-mail charlier@gomemphis.com

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