



# THE MEMPHIS DEPOT TENNESSEE

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## ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD COVER SHEET

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# WWII chemical agents will be removed from depot

By Tom Charlier  
The Commercial Appeal

Decades after they were treated, burned and dumped, chemical munitions will be dug up at the old Defense Depot, then carefully packaged and flown out by helicopter, officials said Thursday night.

In a public meeting, contractors and federal officials outlined plans to clear the 642-acre depot in South Memphis of chemical warfare material in an operation that's expected to begin next spring.

They said the top priority throughout the process will be protecting public safety and the environment.

"We are committed to doing this project safely and successfully," said Randy Reed, life cycle project manager for

UXB International, the Virginia firm hired to remove the chemicals.

The depot, which operated from 1942 to 1997, became the resting ground for two main types of chemical warfare material: the remains of World War II German mustard-gas bombs, and chemical-agent identification kits.

While en route by train to Pine Bluff, Ark., in July 1946, bombs were unloaded in Memphis after they were found to be leaking.

The chemicals were drained into a pit, neutralized and burned.

The identification kits consisted of sets of glass vials used to train soldiers to recognize the odors of chemical agents.

The kits were buried not far from the bomb components in a

disposal area known as Dunn Field.

Officials at the Thursday meeting said that although the chemicals pose no known threat where they are now, their removal is necessary so the depot can be redeveloped by future tenants or owners.

"That (removal) is the one alternative that allows Memphis Depot to transfer this land without restrictions," said Steve Dunn, chemical warfare material project manager for the Corps of Engineers in Huntsville, Ala.

Ross E. Surrency, a geologist with Parsons Engineering Science Inc., said his firm's studies showed that the chemicals have not migrated from the burial locations.

Reed said UXB will conduct the excavation from within a "vapor-containment structure"

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that will protect the community from potential dangers associated.

Charcoal filters will purify the air leaving the tent, and the perimeter of the work site, as well as the workers themselves, will be monitored for contaminants.

Officials have said that the ultimate disposal or treatment method for the chemicals will depend on exactly what the excavation turns up.

Before the work can begin, UXB's extensive safety plans must be approved by the Department of the Army and the Department of Health and Human Services.

That's expected this fall, removal should get under way in

the spring of 2000.

The public can submit comments on the project until at least mid-July.

The meeting was attended mostly by contractors, agency officials and citizen members of the depot's Restoration Advisory Board.

Some board members criticized certain aspects of the project, such as the perceived lack of emergency-response planning, and questioned the accuracy of information used in preparing for the operation.

Call reporter Tom Charlier at 529-2572 or send E-mail to [charlier@gomemphis.com](mailto:charlier@gomemphis.com)

**FINAL PAGE**

**ADMINISTRATIVE RECORD**

**FINAL PAGE**