



Spring Valley ordnance cleanup: past, present and future

1993 to 1995

On Jan. 5, 1993, while digging a utility trench in Spring Valley, a contractor unearthed buried military ordnance. The U.S. Army Technical Escort Unit initiated an emergency response for the 52nd Court area, which was completed Feb. 2, 1993, and resulted in the removal of 141 ordnance items (43 suspect chemical items) from a burial pit.

On Feb. 3, 1993, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, began a remedial investigation of Spring Valley POIs identified through a records search. This process is discussed in more detail in *The investigative process: ordnance and chemical agent containers* fact sheet.

During the extensive, two-year investigation that followed, geophysical surveys for underground, metallic objects were conducted at the POIs considered to be potential ordnance burial pits or trenches. The Corps geophysically assessed approximately 10 percent of all properties outside the identified POIs.

These additional properties served as a check on the historical information that had been gathered. A total of 492 properties were surveyed.

As a result of the geophysical work, over 1,900 anomalies or buried metallic objects were identified. A team of technical experts reviewed the data and recommended 840 anomalies for further study or removal.

Nearly all of the anomalies were determined to be metallic debris from property development, but one piece of ordnance — a spent Livens smoke round — was found.

Two other ordnance items were anonymously left for investigators to find, and an unarmed 3-inch Stokes mortar round was discovered during the digging of a basement.

Approximately 20 other pieces of ordnance scrap items were also found. All of these items were safely removed from Spring Valley.

No additional burial pits were identified and no additional chemical warfare materiel was found during this investigation.

1998 to June 2002

The Corps returned to Spring Valley in 1998 when in the process of reviewing DC Health comments on the 1995 report, the Corps discovered that one of the 1993 POIs was mislocated by 150 feet. The Corps conducted additional field investigations along Glenbrook Road and, after a geophysical survey of 4801 Glenbrook Road, identified two large metallic anomalies that were indicative of possible burial pits.

A plan was developed, and in March 1999 an intrusive investigation began. A year later, the work was completed.

Over 600 items were recovered from these two pits, including 288 munitions. Of those items, 14 were evaluated to have chemical warfare agent, predominantly mustard agent. The 5-gallon ceramic carboys identified from an old photograph as possibly containing mustard agent and being buried at the site were not found in the two pits excavated.

Since locating sites through aerial photos involves some inherent margin of error and interest remained regarding the potential carboys, test pits were conducted next door to the property where the two large pits were found.

These test digs led to the discovery of a third pit at the property boundary of 4801 and 4825 Glenbrook Road, and resulted in the recovery of 379 ordnance items and lab glassware containing small amounts of mustard and lewisite.

The ordnance and lab materials recovered thus far have been removed safely from the site and plans for their destruction are under way.

As of Summer 2002, the Corps had completed excavation of the 4801 Glenbrook Road side of the pit and started landscape restoration. As for the 4825 Glenbrook Road portion, the Corps is awaiting completion of an access agreement from the property owner in order to complete the work at the third pit.

July 2002 and beyond

As additional evidence has been uncovered by the Corps, regulatory entities and even community members, additional sites have been identified that need to be investigated. Also, geophysical detection technology has improved over time, contributing to the decision that additional geophysical characterization is needed at some locations in Spring Valley.

The project partners – Army Corps of Engineers, EPA and D.C. Department of Health – recently developed a general prioritization list of properties in Spring Valley, Fort Gaines and parts of AU Park where additional geophysical investigation may be justified.

The prioritization plan assesses properties based on features identified in historical aerial photos, soil sampling results, anecdotal information and other factors. Based on this evaluation, properties were ranked regarding the likelihood of needing additional geophysical investigation.

The Corps, EPA and D.C. Health discussed the extent of future geophysical work planned and determined that properties would be reviewed by the partnership in groups of 50. Until some of the highest ranking properties are evaluated over the next several years, it will not be known how many properties will actually be investigated.

Some of the residential properties listed in the top 50 have already been addressed. For instance, two properties were 4801 and 4825 Glenbrook Road where previous pit excavations were reported to the community regularly through the *Corps'pondent* and the Spring Valley web site. August through September 2002, two properties on Sedgwick Street were also investigated. Two small munition fragments were recovered, and no AUES-related materiel was found. Two other residential properties on 45th Street were also geophysically investigated in conjunction with arsenic remediation, but no AUES-related metallic anomalies were found.

Beyond these six residential properties, 10 lots on the AU Campus were included in the first 50 properties and have been geophysically assessed. As of December 2002, excavation of identified anomalies is ongoing and will continue into the first quarter of 2003.

In fiscal year 2003, the Corps will begin evaluating an additional 10 to 20 properties from the top 50 list. This work will first involve geophysical surveys on the identified properties using state-of-the-art anomaly detection equipment. The Corps will then discuss the survey results with its partners and the property owners in determining what, if any, follow-up action (e.g., anomaly excavation) is necessary.

The timeline for completion of the ordnance investigation is dependent on what, if anything, is found and the available funding.

Meeting community needs

The Spring Valley team will conduct the planned geophysical work concurrently with ongoing arsenic soil remediation. As a property is scheduled for arsenic soil removal, a geophysical survey also will be conducted if the property was identified as needing investigation through the geophysical prioritization process – only some properties will require both arsenic remediation and geophysical investigation.

The Army has committed to funding the Spring Valley cleanup at \$11 million per year for the next five years. The Corps is committed to moving through this process collaboratively with its agency partners and the Restoration Advisory Board (RAB) and will continue to use both the partnership and RAB meetings to keep the community informed on the progress of the geophysical work.

The Public Affairs Office regularly updates the project's web page and toll-free information phone line, conducts periodic community-wide meetings and distributes project newsletters to approximately 2,200 residences to keep them informed about this project. Additionally, special daily updates will be implemented during anomaly excavations in the event ordnance or agent-related materiel is found.