



US Army Corps
of Engineers
Baltimore District

The Corps'pondent

a newsletter by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers for the residents of Spring Valley

Vol. 1, No. 6

August 1999

Corps reports small fire, no injuries

by Maj. Brian Plaisted
Spring Valley Operations Officer

In continuing with our efforts to keep you fully informed of our activities at the property on Glenbrook Road, I want to give you the most recent information on an unexpected incident that occurred a few days ago at our work site.

Some of you may have seen the news reports, but for those of you who have not, we recently experienced a small fire inside the vapor containment structure that has been built over the area where we are digging in the backyard of the property.

Small fire reported

At approximately 12:38 p.m. on July 29, while digging inside the metal vapor containment structure, workers moved a large piece of white crystalline substance. Minutes later the area underneath the substance began to smoke. At that point, workers made the decision to evacuate the structure.

A small fire then broke out at the spot that had been smoking. The small fire was contained to a 2 to 3-foot area within the structure. Watching the small fire from remote video cameras set up to record work activities, Army ordnance experts

and D.C. Fire Department officials decided to let the small fire burn out. At about 2:30 p.m., the small fire was reported out, but some smoldering continued.

Early the following morning, cameras revealed no visible smoke from the small fire. That afternoon, Army personnel reentered the containment structure to assess the area and begin clean up operations.

No injuries

No injuries were reported as a result of the fire, but as a precautionary measure, D.C. Police temporarily evacuated several homes on Glenbrook Road and two academic buildings on the American University campus until the fire was reported out. Monitoring equipment on site confirmed there was no release of vapors from the structure.

Army personnel have determined that the cause of the small fire was a container of white phosphorous and not a munition. White phosphorous is a compound used to create a smoke screen on the battlefield and is not considered to be a chemical warfare material.

Fire clean up

To clean up from the small fire, workers removed debris from the area

and placed soil potentially containing white phosphorous into metal drums with water.

One 35-gallon and two 55-gallon drums of soil were removed from the area. No additional flare-ups occurred during the clean up. Workers finished the clean up Aug. 2, and normal digging operations resumed Aug. 3.

During the clean up, workers removed several small bottles and two cylinders from the spot of the small fire.

Prior to the fire, workers removed 308 items from the 13 by 23-foot, 10-foot deep pit. These include 188 ordnance items, 32 cylinders, 17 glass containers, 12 metal drums, 22 wooden training aids and 37 other miscellaneous items. Of those recovered, 248 have been determined to be scrap. The remaining 60 items are being analyzed and evaluated for disposal.

For more information on our work activities, please check our website at <http://www.nab.usace.army.mil/environmental/springvalley.htm>, or call our Spring Valley information at 1-800-434-0988. You can reach me at the onsite project office weekdays from 8 to 4:30 p.m. at 202-686-3359.

The Corps'pondent is an unofficial publication authorized under the provisions of AR360-81 and published by the Public Affairs Office, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Baltimore District, P.O. Box 1715, Baltimore, Md. 21203-1715. Telephone: (410) 962-2809; fax: (410) 962-3660, Spring Valley Information Line (1-800-434-0988). It is printed on recyclable paper; press run 1,400. All manuscripts submitted are subject to editing and rewriting. Material from this publication may be reproduced without permission. Views and opinions are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army.

Homepage: <http://www.nab.usace.army.mil/environmental/springvalley.htm>

Baltimore Commander & District Engineer Col. Bruce Berwick
Public Affairs Chief Lucy Lather

Deputy District Engineer, Spring Valley Maj. Brian Plaisted
Public Affairs Specialist Doug Garman



Department of the Army
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
Baltimore District
P.O. Box 1715
Baltimore, MD 21203-1715

Official Business