



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

February 2003

Corps continues AU cleanup, other work progressing

by Gary Schilling
Lead Project Manager, Spring Valley

The Corps of Engineers recently completed its anomaly investigation at American University's intramural fields and Child Development Center.

Most of the anomalies were abandoned utilities and general construction debris that date from the mid-1900s. Several pieces of scrap ordnance were also found, along with pieces of laboratory items that date from the early 1900s.

No chemical warfare material or agent was found.

The Corps will now complete the removal of arsenic soil in these areas, which is likely to continue through February.

Restoration at CDC

Following this project, workers will begin the restoration of the intramural fields and Child Development Center. Concurrent to this work, the Corps is continuing to clear anomalies in a small strip of land that borders American University and several Rockwood Parkway properties—often referred to as the Small Disposal Area.

In a portion of this area, workers have removed a large amount of general building and household-type debris. Mixed in with this debris are several

pieces of scrap ordnance and pieces and intact laboratory items. To date, no chemical warfare material or hazardous items have been found. An archeologist is on site to evaluate the items.

Nearly all of the items appear to be from the 1917 to 1940 timeframe, according to the archeologist. Following the cleanup of this debris, the Corps will remove the arsenic-contaminated soil in these areas. Several arsenic-only grids were cleaned up last year. Work in the Small Disposal Area is likely to continue through the spring.

Soil removal continues

In other work, the Corps continues to make steady progress on the arsenic soil removal and restoration of residential properties.

To date, soil removal and backfilling have been completed on 20 of the 146 properties and lots identified to have grids above the cleanup goal of 20 parts per million.

In the months and years ahead, the Corps will continue this cleanup by placing properties into small manageable groups based on the property-wide arsenic levels and project management factors.

Several local residents ex

pressed concerns about projected tree removal at one of the lots, a small strip of land owned by the D.C. government near the Van Ness Street reservoir. The work was proposed as part of the Corps' arsenic soil removal on this property.

Meeting with residents

In addressing their concerns, the Corps will coordinate with its project partners, D.C. Department of Health and the Environmental Protection Agency, to determine if further delineation of the arsenic levels within the root mass of these trees is needed.

The Corps held a meeting earlier this month with residents adjacent to this lot to further explain the soil removal process and the status of the trees. The tree cutting and soil removal on this property have been postponed until the project partners can decide on the tree removal issue.

The Corps continues to move forward with planning for the next anomaly excavation. This spring, this excavation will occur in an area known historically as the Spaulding/Captain Rankin

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January 2003 RAB meeting

Gary Schilling, the lead Corps project manager on the Spring Valley project, reported that on Dec. 12, 2002, three 75mm shells, thought to contain a solid vomiting agent (Diphenylcyanoarsine), were shipped to a facility in Ohio for disposal.

The following day the rounds were determined to contain arsine gas. The safety procedures used during the shipping process were determined to be appropriate for the shells' contents, and the agency responsible for identifying them is investigating why they were misidentified.

This is the first time that shells containing arsine gas have been found in Spring Valley.

Schilling said the potential presence of additional shells containing arsine would not impact future removal procedures because the current protocol is sufficient to ensure worker and public safety.

Updates on work

Schilling then provided updates on the following:

- draft criteria for sampling beyond the Spring Valley project boundary,
- considerations for expansion of the established boundary, and
- efforts to review available anecdotal and historical data to identify potential areas requiring additional investigation.

Soil removals

To date, soil removal and backfilling have been completed on 20 properties, according to Schilling.

In only one case has the Corps had to "chase" contamination onto a neighboring property that was thought to be free from elevated levels of arsenic.

He pointed out that this progress emphasizes the thoroughness and effectiveness of the project-wide soil sampling plan, which used sidewall sampling to help workers better define the level and extent of arsenic soil contamination at particular properties.

Air sampling

Schilling next presented information related to the plan for a second round of air sampling for the presence of arsenic particulate and arsine gas at a property on Sedgwick Street.

The results from the first round of sampling conducted on that property revealed the presence of particulate arsenic in concentrations above EPA Region III's risk-based concentration for airborne arsenic.

However, the data were suspect due to technology limitations of collecting samples and detecting contaminants at such low concentrations. The Corps is hopeful that the methods used for this second round will eliminate the suspicions. Both the Corps and the EPA stress that this type of sampling borders on research.

Qualifying the data will be further hampered by the fact that there is little data available regarding typical background levels of particulate arsenic in residential indoor air. Schilling stated that this fact again speaks to the challenges and experimental nature of conducting such an air investigation.

Science task group

Next, the RAB's science task group fielded questions regarding its recently released report on soil sampling concerns raised by community board member Kent Slowinski and the part-

ners' previous responses to those concerns. No major issues were discussed during this review.

TAPP consultant findings

Dr. Peter deFur concluded the meeting with a presentation outlining his efforts and findings to date.

He stated that the amount of soil sampling conducted by the Corps in Spring Valley exceeds the amount that he has seen at other sites. In his opinion, the Corps has done a very good job of characterizing the soil for the presence of arsenic.

deFur also reviewed the conceptual site model developed for the Glenbrook Road investigation. He explained that a conceptual model is a schematic or pictorial representation depicting what the investigators believe are the sources of American University Experiment Station contamination, the potential routes of exposure and those potentially exposed.

He suggested that the conceptual site model was adequate for Glenbrook Road, but was never intended to be used for the community wide investigation. He suggested that the model be better defined for directing future investigations.

Finally, deFur discussed the health studies conducted to date. He indicated that soil sampling should be one consideration when determining the need for health studies but that other pathways of exposure must also be considered, providing several recommendations as D.C. Health conducts future health investigations.

Please note that the RAB presentations as well as Dr. deFur's report are available on the project web site.

February 2003 RAB meeting

The Spring Valley Restoration Advisory Board met Feb. 11 at St. David's Episcopal Church.

Gary Schilling, the Corps' co-chair for the board, reported that the Criminal Investigation Divisions for both the Environmental Protection Agency and U.S. Army had completed their investigation of the Corps' past and present activities at the Spring Valley project and found no wrong doing.

'Comfort' letter

Charles Howland, senior assistant regulatory counsel for EPA Region 3, presented the status of EPA's letter that will be issued to the owner of every property participating in the cleanup project.

Once completed, this "comfort" letter will provide a property owner with documentation that the Corps has investigated his or her property to EPA's satisfaction, and that any necessary cleanup has been completed successfully.

EPA has been working with the RAB's Comfort Letter Task Group regarding the language that the community would like to see in the letter to best address property owner needs.

Howland indicated that the next draft will be provided to the task group for review and comment within two weeks and that he would be happy to return when the board is ready to discuss the next steps.

Schilling then outlined the draft schedule of project activity for the balance of the year, as well as fiscal years 2004 and 2005.

The Corps plans to complete arsenic-soil removal on the current group of residential properties by the summer and

begin the next group of properties in the fall. The Corps is planning to have funds available to clean up 200 grids per year for the next several years.

Schilling reported that the Corps is planning to conduct geophysical investigations and map the subsurface of 10 to 20 properties each year to determine if any potential ordnance items are present.

Any properties requiring intrusive investigation (i.e., excavation) would be addressed the following year.

Schilling noted that larger ordnance-related projects are also scheduled in each of the next few years to include completing the removal of the burial pit on 4825 Glenbrook Road in fiscal year 2004.

He added that each larger project could require several million dollars to complete.

Schilling also stressed to the RAB that long-term planning is a fluid process and that many factors can cause a shift in when a planned task is actually funded and completed.

Sampling results

Last, the RAB discussed a recent article in the *Northwest Current* indicating that data was intentionally withheld from a few property owners.

Schilling provided an overview of the sequence of events that led to a few residents not receiving sampling results for more than a year.

He explained that this localized sampling effort in 2001 looked for the presence of over 200 chemicals and found that most of these chemicals were not present in the soil.

Of those chemicals on the list that were found to be present in

the soil, their concentrations were extremely low. The Corps' initial review of these results suggests that no significant health risks exist on these properties.

Dr. Peter deFur, the RAB's technical advisor, also arrived at a similar conclusion that the soil samples taken from these properties do not indicate any significant health risks.

However, he noted that he did have some concerns regarding data weaknesses and the need to track down more scientific information on specific compounds before final conclusions could be drawn.

Both Schilling's presentation and deFur's initial report are available on the project's web site at http://www.nab.usace.army.mil/projects/WashingtonDC/spring_valley.htm.

Corps responsiveness

Some community RAB members expressed concern about the Corps' responsiveness in getting the sampling data results to the property owners.

Members added that such lapses can have an effect on the question of trust, regardless of whether the data results turn out to be significant or insignificant.

The Corps concurred with the RAB's observation on the data issue and acknowledged its responsibility to keep concerned property owners informed and apologized for the delay in sending out the data.

In an effort to further clarify this issue, the Corps agreed to more clearly explain what happened at the next RAB meeting, March 11, and to identify what steps can be taken to avoid such lapses in the future.



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Area, which is comprised of a small strip of land on American University and several properties on Woodway Lane.

Six to seven, 20-foot by 20-foot grids will be cleared of several anomalies and arsenic soil

removed. This work will likely take several weeks.

Also in the weeks ahead, the Corps will begin geophysical surveys on the first group of 10 properties in an effort to identify any additional burial pits or

trenches. This first group will include properties on Sedgwick Street and in the Spaulding/Captain Rankin area.

The project partners are discussing other groups of properties that may need to be surveyed.

Corps to use demilitarization chamber at Spring Valley

Last year, the Corps received approval from the D.C. Department of Health to conduct the demilitarization of conventional ordnance items on the federal property site behind Sibley Hospital.

To prevent storage space concerns and reduce the risks of an

unplanned ordnance detonation during the handling and shipping of conventional ordnance items found during the Spring Valley investigation, a Controlled Detonation Chamber will be used to demilitarize these items.

Since the mid-1990s, this specialized, portable chamber has

safely destroying thousands of ordnance items at both military and civilian site across the country.

This chamber would not be used to destroy any suspect chemical items. The chamber is expected to be set up and operational in March.

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