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News Release

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Army Corps of Engineers begins cleanup of contaminated soil at American University

Baltimore - The Army Corps of Engineers will begin this week to remove contaminated soil from portions of the American University campus as part of the Army's ongoing investigation and cleanup of World War I activities in the Spring Valley neighborhood. Tests conducted last year identified elevated levels of arsenic in the soil next to the University's Child Development Center and on portions of the adjacent intramural fields.

In all, 1.5 to 2 acres of soil will be excavated to a depth of two feet. Confirmation testing will be done to ensure no elevated levels of arsenic remain. The excavated soil will be transported off-site in covered trucks to a permitted non-hazardous waste facility in Virginia. The excavated area will be filled with clean soil. During the work dust control measures will be used, such as wetting the soil and monitoring equipment setup to check air quality. The soil removal is expected to take several months to complete and will cost an estimated \$1.5 million. These funds have been provided as part of the 2002 fiscal year budget.

Last month, the Corps conducted a geophysical survey of these areas and detected several metal items. During the soil removal, these items will be further investigated to determine their identity. If any of these items are ordnance-related, experts will be present to identify and remove them. The Corps will take safety precautions to protect people on the campus.

"The Corps of Engineers is committed to aggressively pursuing the identification and remediation of all hazards associated with past military activities in the Spring Valley neighborhood. The soil removal at American University is an important step toward achieving this goal," said Maj. Michael Peloquin, Deputy District Engineer for the Spring Valley project.

Later this summer, the Corps, in close coordination with the community and project partners, the Environmental Protection Agency and the D.C. Department of Health, will begin similar removal actions at seven residential properties in the AU Park and Spring Valley neighborhoods. In the months ahead, additional residential properties will be scheduled for remediation.

Following the discovery of arsenic at the Child Development Center, American University officials relocated the center until all nearby excavation is completed. Last year, the playground area was remediated. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry conducted an exposure investigation last year on children and staff at the center. Investigation results did not show an exposure to elevated arsenic in either group. American University also arranged for testing of the center children and staff, rugby players, and grounds and maintenance workers. None of those tested had elevated levels of arsenic.

Historical records indicate that portions of the Spring Valley neighborhood were once used by military personnel assigned to the former American University Experiment Station from 1917-1919, to conduct research and testing on World War I chemical warfare materials. In the same period, portions of AU Park were used as a soldier training area known as Camp Leach. Records indicate that Camp Leach was independent of the American University Experiment Station, and not used for chemical research or testing.