



News Release

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Army Corps of Engineers detects a small amount of Lewisite at a Spring Valley site

Baltimore - U.S. Army Corps of Engineers officials announced today that a small amount of Lewisite, a World War I chemical warfare agent, was detected in a sealed glass container recovered during the excavation of a debris field known as Lot 18 in the Spring Valley neighborhood of northwest Washington, D.C.

Laboratory analysis of the contents in the glass container received Aug. 28 from the Edgewood Chemical Biological Command, Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md., confirmed the presence of a solution containing approximately 0.3 percent Lewisite. Lot 18 is a debris field located in the southwestern portion of the American University campus and adjacent to several properties along Rockwood Parkway. The total volume of liquid in this container was 6 milliliters, or approximately one tablespoon.

A conservative mathematical dispersion model run by the Corps, based on 6 milliliters, 100 percent Lewisite solution, indicated that under worst case conditions, had the materiel been released, there would be no effect on anyone beyond a distance of one meter. At all times, the liquid was contained within the sealed glass container. No health or safety incidents were reported by workers during their work at this site.

From November 2002 to May 2003, excavation of this debris field resulted in the recovery of several scrap ordnance items, broken and intact glassware and residential-type trash dating from 1900 to the 1950s. Each of the recovered items was evaluated and cataloged by a Corps of Engineers' safety officer as well as a certified archeologist. On-site evaluation identified three glassware containers as intact, sealed and requiring further analysis. Each of these items was properly packaged and placed in a secure storage area on federal property to await the proper final disposition. The other two recovered glass containers tested negative for chemical warfare agent and contained mixtures of solid organic compounds.

The Corps will employ more stringent safety procedures as an added measure of safety during the remainder of this work. Lot 18 was characterized originally as a low-probability area for encountering World War I-era chemical warfare materiel based on a preliminary risk assessment conducted prior to beginning work. Based on a review of field records and the results of laboratory tests confirming the presence of Lewisite, Corps officials have re-characterized the site as a high-probability area for encountering chemical warfare materiel. Although no health or safety incidents were reported during the work, Corps officials believe this re-characterization of the site is prudent given what has been found.

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Corps finds Lewisite 2-2-2

“The more protective site designation announced today, and the implementation of new procedures, will further ensure the safety of local residents and students as we continue work on this site,” said Gary Schilling, Army Corps of Engineers project manager for the Spring Valley investigation.

Corps officials add that the exact type of procedures to be implemented for future work is currently being evaluated. The plan for resuming Lot 18 work will be presented to the public prior to beginning intrusive activities in late 2003 or early 2004.

Military personnel used portions of the Spring Valley neighborhood from 1917 to 1919 to conduct research and testing on World War I chemical warfare materiel as part of their work at the former American University Experiment Station.

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