CMA U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency
(Provisional)

PROGRESS UPDATE

Newport Chemical Agent Disposal Facility

(as of August 14, 2003)

Where We Are

The Army and Parsons announced the planned October 1, 2003 start date for chemical agent disposal operations at Newport Chemical Depot is delayed by four to six months. Because the Army and Parsons are committed to the safety of the workforce, the community and the environment, the Army and Parsons have agreed to slip the start date by several months in order to resolve challenges related to safety. The new projected start date is to be around January 2004.

- The current Newport Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (NECDF) design has a dry chemical fire suppression system. In order to further enhance protection of the workers and the community in the event of a fire in the areas of the facility where VX will be transferred or processed, the Army has directed Parsons to install a wet sprinkler system as an added safety measure. This system, including containment for potential fluid runoff, will take 4-6 months to design, install and test. This work is being done in parallel with continuing facility systemization and final construction activities.

- The State of Indiana requires that VX be destroyed to 99.9999%, where the VX level in hydrolysate is 230 parts per billion (ppb) or lower. The Army's sodium hydroxide chemical neutralization process exceeds this state requirement. The Army has committed to a more conservative standard for non-detect with a Method Detection Limit no greater than 20 ppb for release of hydrolysate off-site for further treatment. However, recent studies to certify that new laboratory instruments and procedures meet this stringent detection requirement have given inconsistent results. At this time the cause of the mixed results is not known. Scientists are working to confirm whether the results are from "interference", or detection of organic breakdown products rather than VX, so that procedures can be developed to overcome this analytical challenge. The Army continues work to determine the cause of hydrolysate analysis problems and determine a path forward. The Army has made a commitment to the public to not ship hydrolysate for final disposal at a commercial facility if it is above the 20 ppb minimum detection limit.

- The neutralization process planned for Newport will generate approximately one million gallons of hydrolysate. The current NECDF design has storage capacity for 30,000 gallons of hydrolysate. The start of agent operations is dependent on the ability to transport the hydrolysate generated during the neutralization process to a commercial treatment facility, Perma-Fix in Dayton Ohio, for bio-remediation. In the event that hydrolysate can not be transported to Perma-Fix for treatment, construction of a buffer tank farm is required to support the start of agent operations, this could result in additional delays. Parsons has completed a market survey for potential storage tank vendors and a request for proposals could be published as early as September 1, 2003.

- Based on the estimated time needed to install the additional fire suppression system, the new start date is projected to be around January 2004. If it is determined that a buffer tank farm is required to support start of operations, this could result in additional delays. Though the goal is to reduce the risk to the public by destroying the Newport stockpile as soon as possible, neither the Army or Parsons will compromise safety to the workers, public or environment for the sake of schedule.

For more information, contact the Newport Chemical Stockpile Outreach Office, (765) 492-4445 or toll free 1-(866) 300-9034; the Newport Chemical Agent Disposal Facility Public Affairs Office, (765) 245-4475, or Parsons Public Affairs Outreach, (765) 245-5831.