



U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL  
MATERIALS AGENCY

# PRESS RELEASE

## Umatilla Chemical Depot

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
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### Umatilla Depot Resumes Rocket Disposal Operations

UMATILLA CHEMICAL DEPOT, HERMISTON, Ore. — Umatilla Chemical Depot (UMCD) and Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (UMCDF) officials announced today they have resumed M55 rocket disposal operations. Four rockets containing the GB (sarin) nerve agent were successfully destroyed around 10:30 a.m.

Since operations started Sept. 7, depot workers have moved 10 pallets, each with 15 rockets, from a storage igloo to the UMCDF and destroyed 15 rockets.

UMCDF officials suspended disposal operations and initiated a safety stand down last week after two workers inadvertently entered the room storing drained chemical warfare agent wearing a lower level of protective clothing than required for that room. Even though the workers were not exposed to agent, management officials took the incident seriously and wanted to find out why it happened.

“The workers should not have been in that room with the level of protective clothing they were wearing,” explained Don Barclay, the UMCDF Army project manager. “We needed to find out why.”

During the past week, the UMCDF conducted a thorough analysis of the incident, developed a plan to ensure it doesn't happen again, are providing each of the facility's four crews additional training, and have kept the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's chemical weapons disposal project office in Hermiston informed.

“We're ready to move forward,” Barclay said. “We'll be taking all operations - whether disposal, maintenance or anything else - very slowly and step by step to ensure we are precisely following our procedures. The focus is on precision and proficiency, not production.”

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After last week's incident, UMCDF management has initiated changes that include: more detailed communication between workers wanting to enter rooms such as the one storing chemical warfare agent and the facility's control room; pairing chemical-agent experienced workers with less agent-experienced workers; increased management oversight during this adjustment period; and, more reviews after workers complete activities in the disposal building to ensure adherence to procedures.

"Safety remains our top priority," emphasized UMCD Commander Lt. Col. Doc Holliday. "We have safely stored chemical weapons here for more than 40 years. I am confident we can safely destroy them.

"Right now, workers are mentally transitioning from storage and testing to actual disposal operations," Holliday explained. "Taking operations slowly, then stopping, analyzing and making any necessary corrections before moving forward, will help ensure workers have made that transition.

"We've talked a lot about the 3 Ps - people, plant and procedures - being ready to start disposal operations. Now we're emphasizing three more - precision and proficiency before production," Holliday said.

The public can continue to get updated information on disposal operations by calling this toll-free number: 1-888-866-5928. Also, the Umatilla Chemical Disposal Outreach Office, 190 E. Main Street, Hermiston, Ore., is another source for project information.

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*The U.S. Army Chemical Materials Agency is responsible for safely storing and eliminating the United States' aging chemical weapons and agent stockpiles and for the safe elimination of recovered chemical materiel.*

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