



PRESS RELEASE

U.S. ARMY CHEMICAL MATERIALS AGENCY

Umatilla Chemical Depot

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Disposal Facility Testing Complete, Ready for Start-up

UMATILLA CHEMICAL DEPOT, HERMISTON, ORE. – Umatilla Chemical Depot (UMCD) and Umatilla Chemical Agent Disposal Facility (UMCDF) officials announced today that testing activities are complete and they are ready to start chemical agent disposal operations.

Start-up will be a slow, step-by-step process. This afternoon depot chemical weapons handlers are scheduled to move one pallet with 15 GB-filled (sarin) M55 rockets from a storage igloo to the disposal facility. The workers will use a specially designed steel container on a flat bed truck to move the rockets. Afterward, depot and disposal facility officials will evaluate the process to ensure they are ready for the next step – actual disposal operations.

Current plans are to punch, drain and shear one rocket from the pallet of 15 sometime Wednesday morning. The sheared rocket pieces will be thermally decontaminated in the facility's deactivation furnace system. The drained chemical agent will be stored in a facility holding tank. In about a month, officials estimate they will have enough drained agent to destroy in one of the facility's two liquid incinerators.

While making final readiness verifications in mid August, depot officials postponed start-up activities when several issues arose. For example, during the second liquid incinerator's surrogate (industrial chemicals) trial burn, trace amounts of surrogate vapor were detected in the plant's ventilation system. Officials wanted to understand what the readings meant and to ensure the ventilation system's integrity. Questions are answered and issues resolved, giving officials confidence they are ready to begin the step-by-step process of starting actual disposal operations.

“Besides completing other activities during the past three weeks, we have thoroughly reviewed our facility's ventilation systems,” explained Army Site Project Manager Don Barclay. “The monitor readings raised questions we wanted to answer. We've done that. While working

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to ensure we understood the readings, we took time to replace some of the ventilation system's charcoal filter beds, retest the system and other similar systems, and re-verify the test data.

"We've consulted with counterparts at our sister disposal sites and had independent analysis completed," Barclay said. "I am confident that the readings we initially questioned are normal for such systems when measuring at very low levels – one part in a billion, for example. We are measuring molecules. Even though what we were seeing would not be harmful to our workers, the public or the environment, our philosophy when we have such questions is to stop, evaluate and seek resolution before proceeding," Barclay said. "So, that's what we did."

"We knew many people were anxious for us to start," said Depot Commander Lt. Col. Doc Holliday, "but our drivers are safety, security and complying with our permit. We are not on a production schedule.

"Maximizing protection for those who work and live here, the general public and, ultimately, the environment have been and will continue to be at the forefront of what we do," Holliday stated. "I am confident we can do this and now start disposal operations."

The depot will provide the public with regular updates on disposal operations. A toll-free number, 1-888-866-5928, will be updated daily. The Umatilla Chemical Disposal Outreach Office, 190 E. Main Street, Hermiston, Ore., is another source for ongoing information. Operating hours are Mondays – Fridays, 8:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. Phone number is 541-564-9339.

For anyone having questions about emergency preparedness, call the Chemical Stockpile Emergency Preparedness Program (CSEPP). In Oregon, call 1-877-367-2737; in Washington, call 1-800-841-7953; on the internet, www.csepp.net.

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