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SHORELINES

Civilians aid Navy in cleanup

By Candace L. Preston
Shorelines staff writer

MAYPORT — The Navy is using a proactive approach to environmental concerns at Mayport Naval Station that it hopes will clean up the problem and keep its image untarnished.

Since the 1970s, when environmental issues such as hazardous-waste dumping, petroleum spills and leaking landfills started making headlines, many companies and organizations have gone out of their way to keep problems quiet.

But the Navy is inviting the community to get a firsthand look at the extent of the problem and help develop solutions for cleanup efforts.

Officials at Mayport Naval Station advertised in February for community representatives to sit on the base's Restoration Advisory Board. More than 50 people responded, said Capt. Scott Cantfil, base commanding officer.

Four of those applicants were appointed to a seven-member board, along with two representatives from the base and one from the state Department of Environmental Protection. Federal representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency and other agencies will join the group as needed.

The Navy has a good idea what the environmental problems on the base are, said Cheryl Mitchell, the Navy co-

chairwoman of the board. Problem areas include several old landfills, a site where oily bilge water was dumped, old firefighting fields where diesel fuel was used to set fires and sites where contractors did repairs on ships.

Identifying the problem is one thing, she said. Cleaning it up is another, especially with the community's blessing.

The involvement by the community in the cleanup process, Mitchell said, is a way to avoid problems down the road.

"The Navy's priorities for cleanup may be different from the community's," she said. "By keeping them involved at all stages there should be no surprises for the community."

Atlantic Beach City Commissioner Bob Weiss is the civilian co-chairman of the board.

"The Navy has been very open with us, describing what the problems are and what they plan to do about them," he said. "I'm delighted they have asked civilians to monitor them."

Over the years environmental problems have grown, and military installations are no exception, Weiss said.

"The Navy is saying 'we're going to fix ours' . . . and have a very civic-minded program to restore the bases [environmentally] to what they were when the Indians lived there," he said.

For the first few months the board members have been going

through an orientation process, Mitchell said, "bringing them up to speed on the current environmental program at Mayport, what's gone on in the past and what regulations we have to work under."

Mitchell has also spent time showing them what the Navy is doing to determine the amount of contamination at individual sites and reviewing reports.

"They've been a busy bunch so far," she said.

"I've got a half-foot stack of reports so far to read that I think will grow to 4 feet soon," Weiss said.

The board's work can also be beneficial to the community in other ways, Mitchell said.

"We all read papers and know about the environmental problems the civilian sector has," she said. "Those, too, can be brought to the board for discussion and it may be something we have already dealt with on the base and can offer some help."

The other members of the board are Jay Carver, a retired environmental manager; Bronson Lamb III, a Mayport business owner; Patricia Lauderdale, a base employee; Paul Perez, a Jacksonville lawyer; and James Cason, from the Department of Environmental Protection.

The board's meetings are open to the public. The next meeting is at 7 p.m., June 21 at the Atlantic Beach City Hall.