



Portable Detonation Chamber

VIEQUES ENVIRONMENTAL RESTORATION
FACT SHEET

Purchase and Operation

The 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (Public Law 116-92) directed the Navy to purchase and operate a portable closed detonation chamber on Vieques. In accordance with the law, the Navy purchased the ARC 9 GT Total Containment Vessel (TCV) manufactured by NABCO Systems, LLC. The Naval Ordnance Safety and Security Activity (NOSSA) and the Department of Defense Explosives Safety Board (DDESB) provided safety approvals and required the Navy to follow strict procedures during chamber operations.

Discontinued Use

In 2025, the Navy discontinued the use of the ARC 9 detonation chamber on Vieques for the following reasons:

- Protection of public health. Conclusive evidence indicates that the process of open detonation is already protective of public health on Vieques. With oversight by the United States Environmental Protection Agency and the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources, the Navy has used computer modeling and extensive air sampling to demonstrate that the open detonations on Vieques do not produce concentrations of explosive chemicals, metals, or particulate matter that affect public health. The Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) concurred with this conclusion, saying, “Air pollution in the residential areas of Vieques was not and is not a public health hazard” (ATSDR’s Evaluation for Vieques, Puerto Rico, Fact Sheet CS228506-A, 2013).
- Unsafe for site workers. Compared to open detonation, the use of a detonation chamber requires much more movement and handling of UXO. This excessive handling exposes site workers to the very real danger of being injured or killed in an accidental explosion. In contrast, open detonation is much safer for site workers because it can be done with little or no handling of dangerous UXO.
- Unsafe for the Vieques public. The operation of a detonation chamber is a complex, labor intensive, and time-consuming process that is much slower than open detonation. Therefore, continued use of the ARC 9 chamber on Vieques would increase explosive hazards to the public by delaying the cleanup and increasing the amount of time that local residents and tourists may encounter UXO.

When operations began in 2022, Vieques became the only munitions response site where the Department of Defense (including Navy, Army, Air Force, and Marine Corps) was using a detonation chamber for destruction of unexploded ordnance (UXO). As a general rule, detonation chambers are not used to destroy UXO because such operations require excessive handling of UXO and are therefore inherently dangerous.



ARC 9 GT Total Containment Vessel

Follow the 3Rs of Explosives Safety



If you did not drop it, do NOT pick it up!

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