Provide Your Input for the 2020 Community Involvement Plan Update

The Vieques Community Involvement Team is in the process of updating the Vieques Environmental Restoration Program’s Community Involvement Plan (CIP) and invites you to participate! The CIP is a guide to enable meaningful community participation throughout the Vieques cleanup process. The CIP was last updated in October 2015 and can be found at: https://www.navfac.navy.mil/niiris/ATLANTIC/VIEQUES/N69321_003704.pdf

The Vieques Community Involvement Program was established to provide a mechanism to keep the Vieques community informed about the cleanup program and to provide opportunities for the public to offer input into the decision-making process.

As part of the CIP update, the Navy developed a survey questionnaire so that interested community members may provide input. The survey is intended to identify topics of interest and concerns within the community regarding the cleanup process and solicit suggestions on how to enhance information sharing and community involvement. The survey will be made available to the public soon; you will be hearing from us in the coming weeks. We encourage you to participate and let yourself be heard! In addition, the public will have the opportunity to review and provide comments on the updated CIP, which is expected to be available to the public later in the year.

The U.S. Navy (Navy), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), the Puerto Rico Department of Natural and Environmental Resources (PRDNER), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) invite the community to attend the next RAB meeting and provide input on the CIP. Your opinion is extremely valuable. We appreciate your feedback.
Navy Completes First Round of Near-shore Underwater Munitions Removal

The first round of near-shore underwater munitions removal was conducted by the Navy from October 28 to November 8, 2019. During this time the Navy removed 49 munitions from Bahía Salina del Sur, just offshore of the former Vieques Naval Training Range, which is known as CERCLA Site UXO 16. The removal was focused on the “nearshore areas” to reduce the higher potential for human or boat contact with munitions in these areas.

The removal team was composed of two types of scuba divers, some specializing in underwater UXO and others in marine science. Before the munitions removal operations began, the scientific divers provided guidance to the UXO divers on protecting threatened and endangered coral species and instructions on removing certain coral species from munitions items for transplanting. During the removal process, non-federally-listed coral species were safely transplanted to a nearby location away from munitions when it was feasible to do so; munitions with threatened or endangered coral species growing on or adjacent to them were not removed during this event. Once the UXO divers removed non-listed coral specimens from a munition item and then removed the munition item, scientific divers transplanted the corals in a nearby location. The Navy and the U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service will continue to work collaboratively on munitions removal procedures to ensure appropriate marine ecology conservation measures are implemented.

Due to the potential explosive hazard posed by underwater munitions, UXO divers used appropriate techniques, such as controlled lift balloons, to safely lift munitions from the ocean floor and transport them to shore, where they were properly disposed of following strict safety procedures. A safety boat patrolled the removal work area during the length of the operation to ensure the safety of the divers and public.

Future near-shore underwater munitions removal events are planned in 2020.

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