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EPA Places the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area on Vieques on the Superfund National Priorities List

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(05011) New York, New York - The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) today announced the formal listing of the Atlantic Fleet Weapons Training Area (AFWTA) - Vieques on the National Priorities List (NPL) of the most hazardous waste sites. The listing is the next step in a process that began in June 2003 with a request from former Puerto Rico Governor Sila Calderon to list this site as the Commonwealth's highest priority facility on the NPL.

"The listing is a critical step in the cleanup of this magnificent island, so important to Vieques residents and visitors alike," said EPA Acting Regional Administrator Kathleen C. Callahan. "EPA will work with Puerto Rico and the Navy to ensure that the cleanup is performed properly and conducted with full public input."

The AFWTA facility includes land areas, waters and cays in and around the islands of Vieques and Culebra impacted by 100 years of military training operations, largely by the U.S. Navy. The Navy used the eastern portion of Vieques for training from the 1940's until it ceased operations there on May 1, 2003. Areas of Culebra were used for military exercises between 1902 and July 1975. Due to these activities, some land and water may be contaminated with mercury, lead, copper, magnesium, lithium, perchlorate, TNT, napalm, depleted uranium, PCBs, solvents and pesticides.

Today's listing includes areas of Vieques, but postpones a final determination on areas of the AFWTA on Culebra pending the development of a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the Commonwealth and the Army Corps of Engineers (Corps), which is currently responsible for the areas on Culebra. The MOA will govern the actions necessary to protect human health and the environment on Culebra. Puerto Rico and the Army have agreed to pursue this alternate arrangement. If an agreement can be reached, it will not be necessary to list Culebra on the NPL. The government of Puerto Rico and the Army have begun discussions with the goal of reaching an agreement on the timely investigation and cleanup of Culebra through the Army's Formerly Utilized Defense Sites (FUDS) program. The Army, through the Corps, executes the FUDS program in accordance with the Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act, known as CERCLA, and its National Contingency Plan. If an agreement cannot be reached, the Commonwealth may request that Culebra be listed on the NPL.

Notice of the NPL listing will appear shortly in the Federal Register. Supporting documents can be found online. The documents will also be available in hard copy at information repositories on Vieques and Culebra, and in San Juan, Washington, DC and New York City. To make arrangements to view the documents, contact Daniel Rodriguez in Vieques at (787) 741-5201, Brenda Reyes in San Juan at (787) 977-5869, or Dennis Munhall in New York at (212) 637-4343