



COMMONWEALTH OF PUERTO RICO
Office of the Governor
Environmental Quality Board

213
Environmental Emergencies Response Area

November 6, 2008

Mr. Daniel Hood, P.E.
Project Manager
Commander Atlantic Division
Naval Facilities Engineering Command
6506 Hampton Boulevard
Norfolk, VA 23508-1278

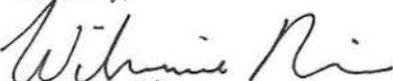
Re: Review of the Navy Draft Landscape/Terrain Features and MEC Clearance Approach White Paper

Dear Mr. Hood:

The Puerto Rico Environmental Quality Board (PREQB) has completed its review of the Navy's Draft Landscape/Terrain Features and MEC Clearance Approach White Paper. Enclosed our comments.

Please contact me at (787) 767-8181 X.6141 if you have any questions or comments about our review.

Cordially,


Wilmarie Rivera
Federal Facilities Coordinator

cc: Daniel Rodríguez, EPA
Richard Henry, FWS
John Tomick, CH2M Hill
Kevin Cloe, Navy
Christopher Penny, Navy

PREQB Comments on the Navy Landscape/Terrain Features and MEC Clearance Approach Technical Paper

1. As discussed at the last MR Subcommittee meeting, this white paper should address how UXO field personnel address areas that they determine are inaccessible to them for the purpose of performing interim (not final) actions such as remedial investigations or interim removal actions. The MR Subcommittee agreed that the field teams should have the authority to make their own determination of when an area is inaccessible. The only thing that is needed is to provide guidance to the field teams on how to document that their work was not performed in the inaccessible area.

The technical paper, as currently written, mixes the discussion of this issue with another issue: inaccessibility as a barrier to access that may be used as an alternative to MEC characterization and removal. Both of these issues (the practical issue of documentation requirements for field teams during interim actions and the more complex issue of determining when inaccessibility is an adequate natural barrier to exposure to MEC hazards) need to be addressed and resolved. But they should not be mixed together because they are separate technical discussions. The technical paper can take two approaches to addressing these two issues:

- Approach 1: The technical paper be divided into two distinct parts to cover these two different subjects, or;
- Approach 2: Develop two white papers, each covering one of the issues.

The path taken should be up to the organization developing the technical paper, and either is acceptable to EQB as long as both issues are discussed separately.

2. For the first inaccessibility issue (inaccessibility to be determined by UXO field personnel during interim actions) it is recommended that the procedures contained in the section "Conclusions and Recommendations" be used. This is very similar to the procedure recommended by the Navy to EQB in the recent response to comments on the "PREQB Comments on the Draft Non-Time Critical Removal Action Work Plan, Surface Munitions and Explosives of Concern at Munitions Response Area- Surface Impact Area, Munitions Response Sites 1 through 7".

In addition to the recommended procedure in the "Conclusions and Recommendations" section and the response to EQB's comments, it may be advisable to add some text clearly giving the field teams the authority to make accessibility determinations for their work and give them some examples of the type of inaccessible conditions they may encounter. Adding "Photographs of the inaccessible conditions" to the bullet list would also be appropriate. But, overall, this procedure is acceptable to EQB especially since this is not a final action and the accessibility of all of these areas will be evaluated again in the future in light of the second accessibility issue (inaccessibility as a barrier to MEC exposure).

3. This comment deals with addressing accessibility as an alternative land use control to prevent exposure to MEC hazards.

- Add a discussion of ocean (off-shore) areas to the section on “Discussion” of “Water Inundated Areas”.
 - Remove the discussion of things that are “not feasible” from the section on “Discussion” of “Water Inundated Areas”. Feasibility will be determined in the Feasibility Study (FS).
 - It is recommended that the discussion of workers and field team safety be removed from the section on “Steep Grades” because this issue was addressed in the other section authorizing workers to declare areas inaccessible on interim projects.
 - The information on the various standards for steep grades in the “Steep Grades” section is valuable information, but is not a substitute for site-specific data for Vieques. It is recommended that a small group of stakeholders visit a selection of measured steep grades and personally attempt to climb them. This was done for the Adak, Alaska, project and it allowed the Project Team to authoritatively respond to questions on the validity of the selection of more than 30-degree slope as inaccessible. These questions persisted throughout the project and being able to document the difficulty of climbing a slope greater than 30-degree in the vegetation present on that project was extremely valuable. It is recommended that a similar trial be performed on Vieques.
 - The last paragraph in the section on “Steep Grades” combines steep grades and vegetation to claim “a control on accessibility”. This should be removed from the document because there is no basis established for this conclusion. One could just as easily claim that vegetation makes climbing a steep grade easier because the vegetation provides foot- and hand-holds that would not be present on an unvegetated slope. It is recommended that this unsupported discussion of the inaccessibility of combined steep grades and vegetation either be removed or supported.
4. The section on “Conclusions and Recommendations” only addresses the issue of inaccessibility for workers on interim actions. It doesn’t address inaccessibility from the standpoint of limiting exposure of the property users to the MEC hazards. It is recommended that conclusions on the effect of inaccessibility on access to MEC hazards be addressed after the site visit and accessibility trial suggested in #3 above to provide actual site data on this subject.

