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## DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY

NORTHERN DIVISION  
NAVAL FACILITIES ENGINEERING COMMAND  
10 INDUSTRIAL HIGHWAY  
MAIL STOP, #82  
LESTER, PA 19113-2090

IN REPLY REFER TO

Code 1823/JS

21 MAR 2000

Mr. Paul Kulpa  
Remedial Project Manager  
Rhode Island Department of Environmental Management  
Office of Waste Management  
265 Promenade Street  
Providence, Rhode Island

Ms. Kymberlee Keckler  
Remedial Project Manager  
United States Environmental Protection Agency  
1 Congress Street, Suite 1100  
Boston Massachusetts, 02114

Dear Mr. Kulpa and Ms. Keckler:

SUBJECT: OLD FIRE FIGHTING TRAINING AREA (OFFTA) ECOLOGICAL RISK ASSESSMENT  
NAVAL STATION NEWPORT, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND

As discussed during the teleconference held on November 4, 1999, the Navy requests finalization of the Marine Ecological Risk Assessment (ERA) for the Site 9 OFFTA.

The Navy received comments to the draft ERA that questioned the appropriateness of the reference stations used to compare site risk. A meeting was held in June 1999 to discuss this issue, and it was agreed that the Navy would perform an assessment of other reference data available from Narragansett Bay to replace existing reference data. At that time, the Navy also agreed to consider the collection of additional reference station data in support of future documents (PRGs and the FS). The data assessment was performed and included in the Draft Final ERA report in July 1999. The result of this assessment was that other data points available were determined not to be appropriate for use because of different physical characteristics of the locations, and a justification of the use of the existing ERA reference stations was provided. In subsequent correspondence dated September 8, 1999 (response submitted September 30) and October 28, 1999 (response submitted November 30, 1999), RIDEM again stated that the report could not be finalized as is. However, neither a technical rationale for dismissing the Navy's proposal or specific recommendations for improvements was provided in either letter.

During the meeting held on December 8, RIDEM stated that they would evaluate the available reference data and provide a recommended approach and rationale for proceeding. This was agreed to and the Navy requested a schedule extension for submittal of the final ERA until this material could be prepared and evaluated by all the team members. On February 18, 2000, RIDEM provided a letter to the Navy stating their recommended approach. The Navy has evaluated their recommendations as described below.

The RIDEM recommends use of Jamestown reference stations sampled as a part of the Derecktor Shipyard ERA to compare to the OFFTA site stations, because although the physical characteristics of these stations do not match those in the offshore stations at Coasters Harbor, they were used successfully for the Derecktor site. The Navy has already evaluated these stations for inclusion in the ERA report, and has found them to be inappropriate for direct comparison to the OFFTA stations, due to differences in substrate and distance from other potentially influencing sources of contaminants near Coasters Harbor. In

addition, the Navy has stated that overall findings of the risk assessment would not be altered appreciably by replacing reference data (refer to Response to Comments, dated September 30, Attachment B, Comment No. 1), although it would involve a complete revision of the report adding cost and delaying progress for six months.

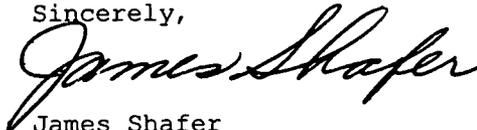
The RIDEM also recommends the Navy reevaluate the data as was done by the state; however, RIDEM did not provide any technical details concerning the analysis it performed. The Navy cannot find a benefit for evaluation of the data beyond what was performed for the ERA, along with re-evaluations and revisions prepared through response to this and other previous RIDEM comments.

Finally the RIDEM requests the Navy to consider removal of sediments in concert with the dredging action planned for McAllister Point Landfill. This approach would not follow the Federal Facilities Agreement or CERCLA, which requires a risk based remedial alternative, be selected. Such an action gives no consideration to disruption of valuable bay habitat that is currently present in this area, regardless of potential for risk. For example an evaluation of re suspension will be provided in the upcoming Feasibility Study and no information to date indicates that there is a need for an emergency action.

The USEPA 's letter dated October 25, 1999 indicated that the draft final ERA has adequately addressed most of EPA's comments and is consistent with EPA guidance as required by the FFA. At the last Ecological Advisory Board (EAB) meeting, EPA recommended that the Navy include an enhanced uncertainty section to explain the variability among the reference sites and its effect upon the ERA conclusions. This has been done in the draft final ERA. During the meeting the Navy and EPA expressed concern that decisions be based on sound technical practices and that manipulation of the reference site data could unduly skew the ERA conclusions. During our most recent Project Managers conference call, EPA stressed that RIDEM's proposal to dredge the area without completing the proper risk assessments is not consistent with the CERCLA.

Since the RIDEM recommendation is not agreed by all parties, and because it would require a full revision of the ERA report, incurring a notable delay of at least six months in the completion of the RI, and because such a revision is not expected to alter the overall findings of potential for risk, the Navy recommends moving ahead and finalizing the ERA report, then completing the RI and FS for this site as appropriate. We believe this is the proper way to proceed with the cleanup of this site that meets our obligations and requirements of CERCLA. The Navy believes that it has made every attempt to reasonably address RIDEM's concerns and comments and is proposing finalization of the ERA report in accordance with the Federal Facilities Agreement. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



James Shafer  
Remedial Project Manager  
By direction of the  
Commanding Officer

Copy to:  
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RAB  
*K. Finkelshtam*