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EPA's new waste policy targets local sites



By Jennifer Moroz:Special to The Packet

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WASHINGTON - Armed with an aggressive new policy aimed at making the cleanup of hazardous waste more timely and efficient, the Environmental Protection Agency has taken aim at 34 sites in South Carolina, including the Parris Island Marine Corps Recruit Depot and Marine Corps Air Station Beaufort.



For years, cleanup of contaminated property at facilities that manage hazardous waste has not moved quickly enough," said Timothy Fields, EPA's assistant administrator for solid waste management. "These reforms will ensure that all contaminated waste-management facilities will adopt aggressive goals for cleanups."



Nationwide, a total of 1,712 facilities that generate, store, treat or dispose of hazardous waste have been identified for priority cleanup. The EPA took two factors into consideration: groundwater contamination and potential for human exposure to pollutants.



The agency said at many of the sites, contamination stems from toxic waste disposals made years ago before current environmental laws and regulations came into effect.



At Parris Island, the problem is three large industrial waste landfills built in the 1960s, according to Art Sanford, environmental project manager for both Beaufort County military installations. Parris Island already is part of the agency's superfund program, which was created by Congress in 1980 to locate, investigate and clean up the worst sites nationwide.

Feedback

At the Beaufort air station, there are seven landfills containing jet fuel, pesticides and other waste, Sanford said. Because both Beaufort County sites are located in wetland areas, they are at a high risk for groundwater seepage, according to EPA officials.

While the EPA said complete cleanup is the ultimate goal, it has set a timetable to gauge progress. The organization hopes to reduce pollutant levels to the point where 95 percent of facilities have "current human exposures under control" and 70 percent have

“Emigration of contaminated groundwater under control” by 2005.

Sanford said that the risk to humans is very low at Parris Island and the air station. “It's the eco-risks that are high,” he said.

Unlike many other sites, work is already under way to rid Beaufort County of the waste. Sanford said the landfills at Parris Island already are under contract for cleanup and smaller, piecemeal efforts are being carried out at the air station.

“We'll have reports out this year,” he said.

All facilities targeted by the reforms must cover their own cleanup costs. Funds earmarked by the Department of Navy for environmental restoration are being used to pay for cleanup efforts at the Beaufort and Parris Island installations.

Jennifer Moroz reports for the Medill News Service in Washington, D.C.

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