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Navy checking out what's beneath shipyard's landfill

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KITTERY, Maine — The latest in survey technology is allowing Navy officials to see what lies beneath the surface on Jamaica Island.

The Navy began using its Multi-Sensored Towed Array Detection System last week to survey the Jamaica Island Landfill at the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard. The 25-acre site was a repository for shipyard wastes for approximately 30 years.

On Tuesday the Navy shared the technology with representatives from the Environmental Protection Agency, Maine Department of Environmental Protection, and the Restoration Advisory Board, a community group established to work in partnership with the Portsmouth Naval Shipyard on environmental restoration issues.

The demonstration included a look at the equipment in operation on Jamaica Island and a preview of the computer software program used to interpret the data.

The Multi-Sensored Towed Array Detection System, which makes possible a noninvasive view of the bottom of the landfill, was originally developed by the Naval Research Lab as a tool to search for unexploded ordnance, such as mines. The Navy is now in the process of determining whether the equipment has other potential uses, such as mapping metal items in a landfill site.

The system consists of a customized all-terrain vehicle which pulls a trailer mounted with electronic sensors. The equipment maps the location of ferrous or steel objects buried underground and produces survey data that is later analyzed by computer.

The Naval Research Lab is in the process of conducting surveys of two sites at the shipyard to determine what is buried within either site and if any hazardous chemicals to have been released into the environment.

"The Navy is committed to the environmental restoration of Portsmouth Naval Shipyard through the use of the best methods and techniques available," said Shipyard Public Affairs Officer Deborah White.

The approximate cost of the survey is \$150,000. It is being paid for by the Navy's Environmental Restoration Fund.

Based on the results of the Multi-Sensored Towed Array Detection System survey, the Navy plans to conduct test pits sometime next summer in an attempt to determine the contents of the landfill.

Survey results should be compiled within 90 days.