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Navy says test facility in Bucks is not polluting water supplies

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A five-month study and water analysis at the Naval Air Development Center (NADC) in Warminster, Bucks County, has shown that no chemicals or other wastes stored in several NADC waste sites are contaminating area water supplies, NADC officials announced yesterday.

The study, NADC public affairs officer Joseph P. Cody explained at a news conference, showed that seven waste-disposal sites are "not contaminating ground water and surface water on NADC property and are not contributing harmful pollutants to the water in the immediate vicinity."

Cody said Navy officials hoped that the study would put to rest the suspicion of some residents near the 823-acre research facility that chemicals were leaking into area water supplies and had caused what the residents felt was an unusual number of birth defects and cases of leukemia.

"I plan to personally contact the families that have contacted me and let them know about the results," Cody said. "We feel much better now that we have these results."

Cody said the NADC would continue to monitor the 24 test wells drilled during the study for any signs of pollution, and would allow Warminster and Northampton Township water officials and others to take samples.

The possibility that some NADC activity had polluted local water supplies was raised in early 1981 when the Warminster Municipal Authority discovered trichloroethylene (TCE) — a common industrial degreaser that tests have linked to the develop-

ment of cancer in laboratory animals — in two of its wells.

Subsequently, some residents of the Storybrook Homes development, on the east side of the NADC along Newtown Road, asked for an investigation, noting what they believed was an unusually high number of birth defects and incidences of leukemia among neighborhood children.

An eight-month inquiry conducted jointly by the federal, state and county governments found that there was no connection among the birth defects, the TCE contamination and the activities at the NADC, and that the birth defects were not statistically abnormal, considering the area's population.

Some of the residents, however, remained skeptical, and it was this feeling, Cody said, that led NADC officials to request that the Navy move up its scheduled time in a two-year-old program to assess the condition of chemical-waste storage sites at its facilities across the country.

In June, the NADC signed a \$90,000 contract with JRB Associates of McLean, Va., to sink wells and perform water analyses on nine areas believed to be the sites of underground chemical- and waste-storage sites.

Even though the previous study had ruled out any connection between the NADC and the complaints, Cody said, there was still concern "not because of anything we really did, but because of things we didn't know."

The NADC, one of the Navy's major nonweapon materials-research facilities, now employs a disposal company to remove its chemical wastes. But from the 1940s until as late as 1980, several underground sites on the base were used for permanent waste storage — trash, industrial sludge and some solvents.

Records of those sites and what is stored there are "sparse or nonexistent," Cody said, and talks with retired employees did not add much information.