

Trenton Times
5/10/98

Navy waging war on center's tainted soil

By JULIE WILLMOT
Staff Writer

EWING — Cleanup of the Naval Air Warfare Center, slated to close in December, is proceeding according to schedule, said Barry Barclay, closing coordinator.

As it has done throughout the process, the NAWC will take public comment on the cleanup progress. One particular section of the 65-acre property will be the topic at a meeting May 27 at the municipal building.

At that time, NAWC personnel will field questions regarding Site 4, an approximately 10-acre plot on the eastern side of the railroad tracks. Soil from that site has been deemed contaminated by the NAWC environmental team and plans for the soil disposal will be discussed at the May 27 meeting, Barclay said.

The NAWC, where jet engines, fuels, lubricants and bearings are tested, is

scheduled to close this December under a decision by the federal Base Realignment and Closure Committee.

The plan is to have the entire property cleaned by October, said Barclay. Before the Navy can sell the property, it is required make the site environmentally clean and earn a stamp of approval from state and/or federal environmental agencies.

The cleanup follows a two-year investigation into what contaminants might be on the property. Barclay said the Navy delves into the property history by asking former employees and neighbors what chemicals or work was done on the premises. "We go back as far as we can, even before the Navy came here, and ask if people remember any dumping or specific activities that went on. Then we pinpoint the location and test for contaminants," Barclay said.

IN SOME CASES, soil has to be cleaned and then redeposited, and occasionally hauled away to landfills. At one

site on the grounds, in excess of 5,000 cubic yards of soil had to be removed because of chemical contamination.

"It's an extremely exhaustive process," Barclay said.

There is groundwater contamination on the site and the Navy has set up a special treatment plant on the property that draws up the contaminated water, filters it, and slowly returns it back to the ground.

The contamination sits on a bedrock base up to 300 feet underground. The primary chemical found is trichloroethylene, TCE, a common industrial solvent frequently found contaminating industrial sites, "the WD-40 of years ago," Barclay said.

An abundance of it is at this property because NAWC used it as a lubricant and a coolant.

The water treatment will continue after the Navy moves out and will stay in place until the cleaning process is completed. "We have to prove that the treatment we have in place is the best way to

treat the contaminants and that there will be no hazard to the public health," Barclay said.

Residential wells in a one-mile radius around the property were tested and showed no signs of contamination, he said.

Documentation of the work performed on the site is on file at the Ewing Branch of the Mercer County Library on Scotch Road.

IN ADDITION to the May 27 meeting at 8 p.m., comments may be written to Base Environmental Coordinator Ken Smith, NAWC, P.O. Box 7176, Trenton, N.J. 08628-0176.

Reuse plans show the 65-acre property being divided into three parcels. Parcel A, about 27 acres, will go to Mercer County for airport use. A fraction of the 9-acre parcel C will play host to the post office, with the remainder of that going to the auction block in October. Parcel B, the largest, with almost 29 acres, will be sold to the highest bidder.