

Navy cites upgrade in waste disposal

Job now done by commercial carriers

By Beau Halton
Staff writer

Jacksonville Naval Air Station now hires commercial carriers to transport hazardous wastes, in contrast to uncontrolled dumping common for decades at the base, Navy officials said yesterday.

A recent study done for the Navy by a New York consulting firm found that huge amounts of hazardous wastes had been dumped for more than 40 years into ditches and landfills at Jacksonville NAS and that some of the materials may have seeped into the groundwater and the St. Johns River.

But that is no longer done, Navy spokesman Nick Young said.

"We feel we have an environmentally sound program for disposing of all of our hazardous wastes now," Young said. "The thing that people forget is that back in those days everyone used to get rid of the stuff that way."

"But now, we all have state and federal laws to comply with. And everyone on the base does."

But Navy and environmental officials have yet to realize the true aftermath of uncontrolled dumping that occurred during the days before stringent federal and state environmental regulations were enforced in the 1970s.

Officials now are awaiting results of water and soil samples taken at

the base after the study.

The results are expected in July, a state Department of Environmental Regulation spokesman said earlier this week.

Under the current program at Jacksonville NAS, Young said, each squadron or command on base that generates hazardous waste is monitored to determine how the material is stored while awaiting pickup by the commercial hauler, and to ensure that it is picked up safely.

"Also, under the law, if the waste is not disposed of properly, the generator [in this case, Jacksonville NAS] is held responsible," Young said.

How do officials know that — even now — everyone on the base adheres to the environmental regulations? "No one can monitor every guy with a bucket full of something," he said, "but we enforce the laws as well as we can."

There are still "some practices" at the local base that were questioned during the study, Young said, such as laying sludge out to dry at the base sludge farm. The area was named in the original study.

"That's required prior to disposal sometimes," Young said. "Sludge is not necessarily always toxic. But even then, we have to submit quarterly reports to DER."

The Navy study said, "The environ- (See CONTAMINATION, Page B-6)

Contamination persists as result of past practices

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mental setting at Jacksonville NAS and Naval Fuel Depot Jacksonville is characterized by geologic and hydrologic conditions favoring the movement of pollutants with groundwater and migration of pollutants to the St. Johns River. In areas adjacent to both bases, groundwater is externally used for both public and private water supply."

Thirty-eight areas at the base were originally named as potential contamination sites.

The study concludes that, at one site, "It is likely that a variety of chemical wastes may have been disposed/spilled on the ground and since have migrated back into the storm sewer."

"The storm sewer acts as a conduit to the St. Johns River. The possible discharge of toxic materials through the storm sewer to the St. Johns River poses a potential threat to human health and aquatic life in the river."

Sites that were named by the Navy study as potentially contaminated, and also which were recommended by DER to be studied further for possible pollution effects, include:

- Firefighting training area, just north of the base sewage treatment plant. Junk vehicles used for training were ignited with jet fuel or waste oil. About 6,000 gallons of fuel was burned annually and most of the liquid ran

off the site.

- Sludge disposal area near the sewage treatment plant. A 15-acre area at which about 20,000 tons of sewage sludge containing toxic metals was dumped between 1962 and 1980.

- Hangar Building 101. Unauthorized disposal of about 2,000 gallons of waste solvents occurred for many years below steel floor plates. Infiltration of waste solvents and other flammable liquids from deteriorated sewer lines into the groundwater.

- Naval Air Rework Facility solvent and paint sludge disposal area, on the eastern side of Building 970. Disposal of solvents and paint sludges until 1978. Soil caked and cracked and contains white residue.

- Glass bead disposal area along river bank. Used to dispose of spent beads from NARF abrasive blasting. About 300,000 pounds of beads, containing cadmium, chromium, nickel and lead, dumped every year.

- Radioactive waste fill area. Radium paint wastes dumped here until the 1950s. When operation ceased some thousands of pounds of contaminated soil were dumped on the river edge near the base marina.

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